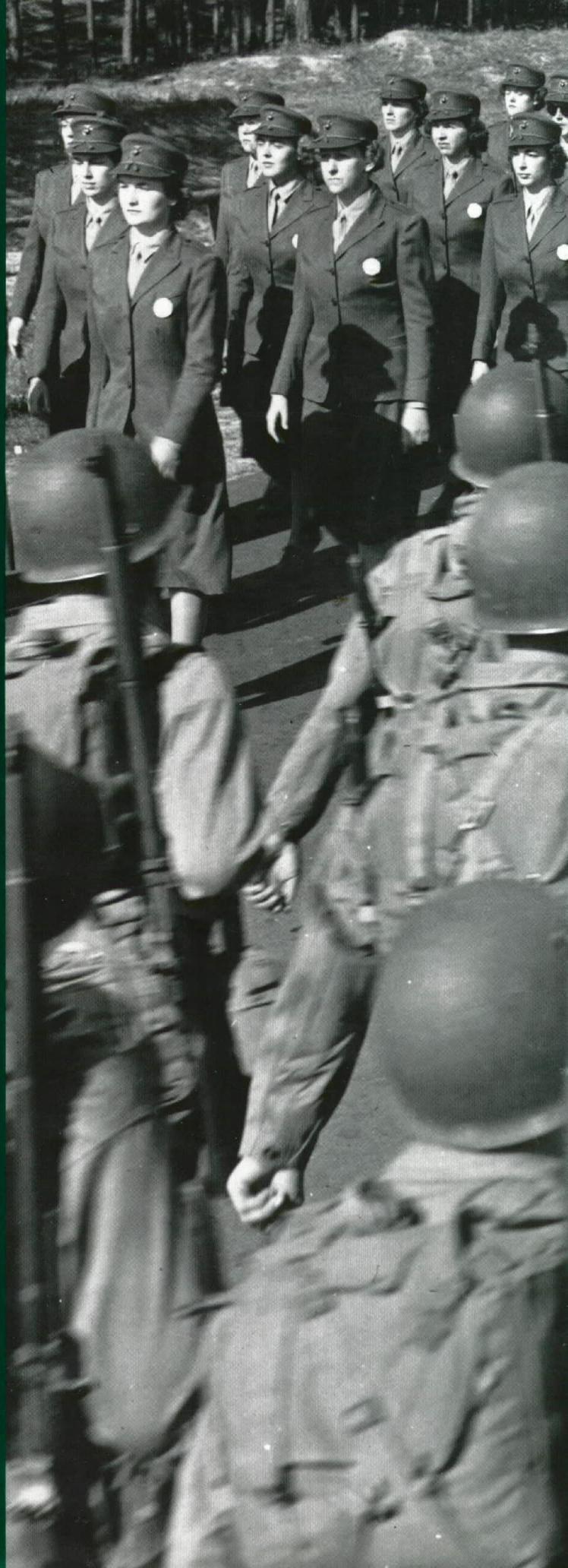
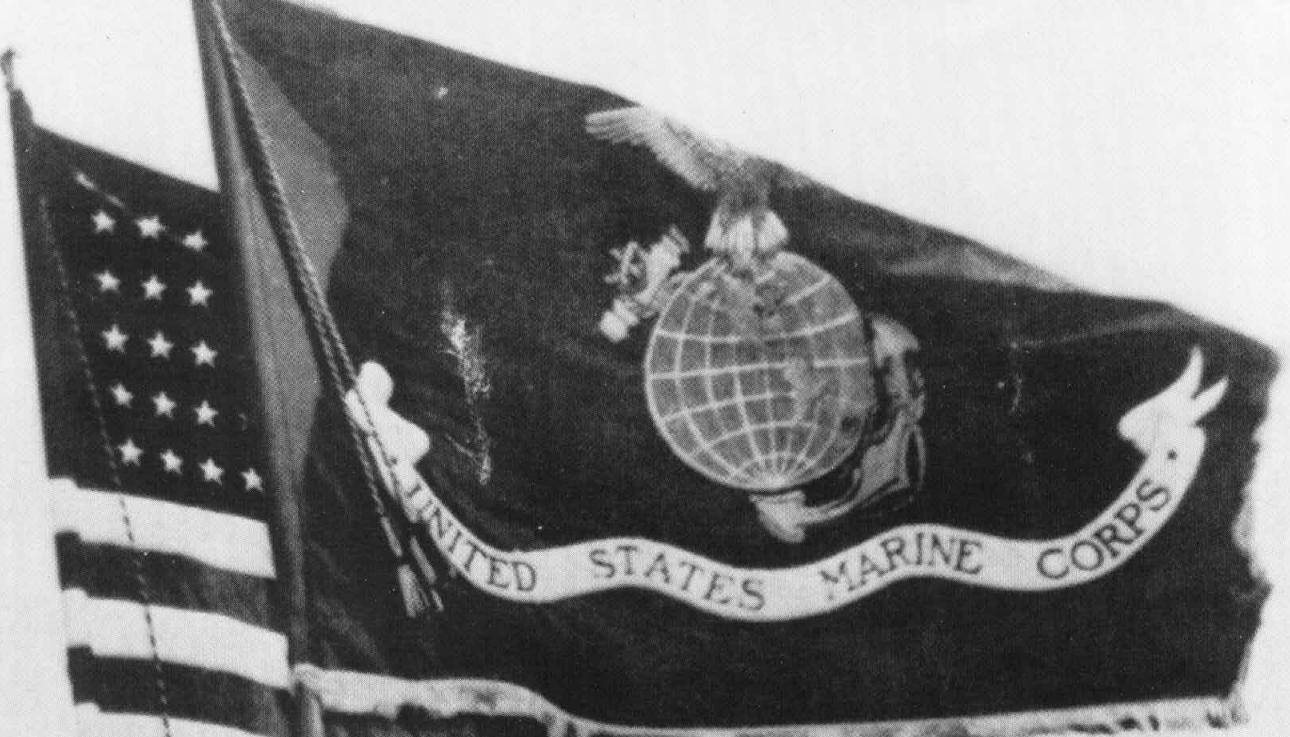


FREE A MARINE TO FIGHT: WOMEN MARINES IN WORLD WAR II

MARINES IN
WORLD WAR II
COMMEMORATIVE SERIES

BY COLONEL MARY V. STREMLOW
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by Colonel Mary V. Stremlow, USMCR (Ret)

Some stories sound too contrived to be true, yet are repeated too often to be dismissed as mere folklore. One such tale was rescued and restored to its rightful place in history when Mary Eddy Furman confirmed that, yes, the portrait of Archibald Henderson, 5th Commandant of the Marine Corps, crashed from the wall to the buffet the evening that Major General Commandant Thomas Holcomb announced his decision to recruit women into the Corps. Mrs. Furman, then a child, was a dinner guest at a bon voyage dinner party given for her father, Colonel William A. Eddy, and the Commandant's son, Marine Lieutenant Franklin Holcomb, on 12 October 1942 when the Commandant was asked, "General Holcomb, what do you think about having women in the Marine Corps?" Before he could reply, the painting of Archibald Henderson fell.

We can only surmise how Archibald Henderson would have reacted to the notion of using women to relieve male Marines "for essential combat duty." On the other hand, General Holcomb's opposition was well-known. He, as many other Marines, was not happy at the prospect. But, in the fall of 1942, faced with the losses suffered during the cam-

paign for Guadalcanal—and potential future losses in upcoming operations—added to mounting manpower demands, he ran out of options.

With 143,388 Marines on board and tasked by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to add 164,273 within a year, the Marine Corps had already lowered its recruiting standards and raised the age ceiling to 36. At the same time, President Roosevelt's plan to impose a draft threatened the elite image earned by the selective, hard-fighting, disciplined Marines, and so, the Commandant did what he had to do. In furtherance of the war effort, he recommended that as many women as possible should be used in non-combatant billets.

The idea was unpopular, but neither original nor unprecedented; women were already serving with the Army and in the Navy and Coast Guard Reserves. In fact, during World War I, 300 "Marinettes" had freed male Marines from their desks and typewriters at Headquarters, Marine Corps, to go to France.

Periodically, between World War I and World War II, prodded by people like Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall and Congresswoman Edith Nourse Rogers, military and elected leaders gave fleeting thought to the idea of a women's corps. Marshall knew that General John J. Pershing had specifically asked for, but not received, uniformed female troops. Rogers, a Red Cross volunteer in France in 1917, was angry that women who had been wounded and disabled during the war were not entitled to health care or veterans' benefits. She promised that "... women would not again serve with the Army without

the protection the men got."

Yet, until 1941, not many people took the available studies seriously and even advocates could not agree on whether the women should be enlisted directly into the military or be kept separate, in an auxiliary, where they would work as hostesses, librarians, canteen workers, cooks, waitresses, chauffeurs, messengers, and strolling minstrels.

Congresswoman Rogers eventually compromised and settled for a small auxiliary and in May 1941 she introduced H.R. 4906, a bill to establish the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) to make available "... to the national defense the knowledge, skill, and special training of the women of the nation." The legislators argued and stalled. Even the brazen Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor was not enough to move them to pass the bill until 15 May 1942.

Unfortunately, the notion was doomed from the start and the WAAC, an auxiliary of women who were neither military nor civilian, ultimately was reorganized and converted to full military status as the Women's Army Corps (WAC) in late summer 1943. Meanwhile the Navy watched the unraveling of the WAAC very closely as it struggled with its own version of a plan for women.

Some say there were naval officers who preferred to enlist ducks, dogs, or monkeys to solve the manpower shortage, but the decision was made at the highest level to use women and furthermore, recognizing the fate of the failed WAAC, the women would be "in" the Navy. With sideline help from Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt, the Navy bill, Public Law 689, was signed on 30 July 1942, establishing

On the Cover: "Free a Marine to Fight" could well be the caption of this picture as women Marine recruits pass male Marines in combat gear heading for field training at Camp Lejeune in 1943. Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 6153

At left: A WR color guard is photographed at Headquarters, Marine Corps, summer 1944. Photo courtesy of Mary R. Rich

the Navy Women's Reserve (WAVES). The same law authorized a Marine Corps Women's Reserve (MCWR), but the Marines weren't ready to concede just yet. In the meantime, the Coast Guard formed a women's reserve, the SPARS.

Bowing to increasing pressure from the Congress, the Secretary of the Navy, and the public, the M-1 section of Plans and Policies at Headquarters, Marine Corps, proposed a women's reserve to be placed in the Division of Reserve of the then-Adjutant-Inspector's Department. The Commandant, in the absence of reasonable alternatives, sent the recommendation to Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox, and, in the end, the matter was finally settled for the Corps on 7 November 1942 when President Franklin D. Roosevelt gave his assent.

Early Planning

On 5 November, the Commandant wrote to the commanding officers of all Marine posts and procurement districts to prepare them for the forthcoming MCWR and to ask for their best estimates of the number of Women Reservists (WRs) needed to replace officers and men as office clerks, radiomen, drivers, mechanics, messmen, commissary clerks, etc. He made clear that, within the next year the manpower shortage would be such that it would be incumbent on all concerned with the national welfare to replace men by women in all possible positions.

Armed with the responses, planners tried to project how many women possessing the required skills would be enlisted and put to work immediately, and how many would need special training in such fields as paymaster, quartermaster, and communicator. Based on their calculations, quotas were established for recruiting and training classes were scheduled.

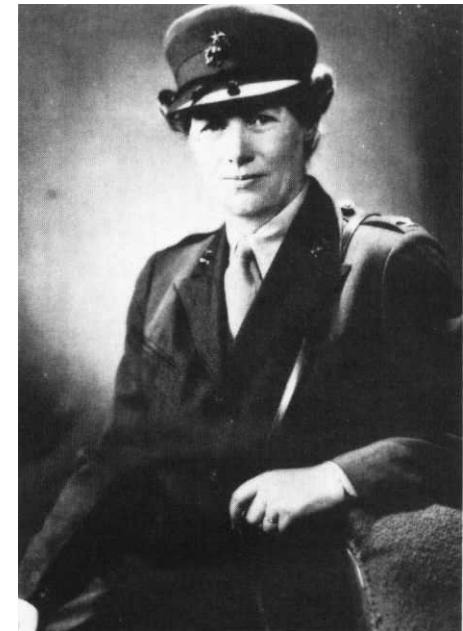
Early estimates called for an initial target of 500 officers and 6,000 enlisted women within four months,

and a total of 1,000 officers and 18,000 enlisted women by June 1944. The plan for rank and grade distribution followed the same pattern as the men's with only minor differences. For officers there would be one major and 35 captains, with the balance of the remaining commissioned officers being first and second lieutenants.

The highest rank, fixed by Public Law 689, permitted one lieutenant commander in the Women's Reserve of the U.S. Naval Reserve, whose counterpart in the Marine Corps would be a major. Eventually, the law was amended so that the senior woman in the Navy and Coast Guard was promoted to captain and in the Marine Corps to colonel.

The public, anticipating a catchy nickname for women Marines much like the WACS, WAVES, and SPARS, bombarded Headquarters with suggestions: MARS, Femarines, WAMS, Dainty Devil-Dogs, Glamarnes, Women's Leather-neck Aides, and even Sub-Marines. Surprisingly, considering his open opposition to using women at all, General Holcomb adamantly ruled out all cute names and acronyms and when answering yet another reporter on the subject, stated his views very forcefully in an article in the 27 March 1944 issue of *Life* magazine: "They are Marines. They don't have a nickname and they don't need one. They get their basic training in a Marine atmosphere at a Marine post. They inherit the traditions of Marines. They are Marines."

Marine women of World War II were enormously proud to belong to the only military service that shared its name with them and, actually, insisted upon it. It happened that, in practice, they were most often called Women Reservists, informally shortened to WRs. When referred to as women Marines, or Marine women, the "w" was not capitalized as it was later, after the passage of the Armed Forces Integration Act of 1948, the



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 12627
Col Ruth Cheney Streeter, the first director of the Marine Corps Women's Reserve, was photographed at Headquarters, Marine Corps, Washington.

law that gave women regular status in the military. Then, Women Marines were best known as WMs. In fact, women would have to wait 30 years before the gender designator would be dropped and they at last would be simply Marines.

The First WRs

The decision to organize the Women's Reserve in the Division of Reserve was natural because the division was already responsible for recruiting all reserve personnel. Up to this point it had nothing to do with training, but now, it inherited all matters pertaining to the Women's Reserve, including training, uniforming, and administering. An organization created within the Division, the Women's Reserve Section, Officer Procurement Division, was staffed to handle the new activity. It very capably accomplished its first mission, the selection of a suitable woman for the position of Director of the MCWR when the eminently qualified Mrs. Ruth Cheney Streeter was commissioned a major and sworn in by the Secretary of the Navy on 29 January 1943.

Major Streeter was not, however,

the first woman on active duty in the World War II Marine Corps. A few weeks earlier, Mrs. Anne A. Lentz, a civilian clothing expert who had helped design the uniforms for the embryonic MCWR, was quietly commissioned with the rank of captain. She had come to Marine Headquarters on a 30-day assignment from the WAAC and stayed.

By all accounts, the selection of Mrs. Streeter to head the MCWR was inspired. It fell to this woman who had never before held a paying job, to facilitate recruiting, training, administration, and uniforming of the new Women's Reserve.

Mrs. Streeter, 47, president of her class at Bryn Mawr despite completing only two years of college, wife of a prominent lawyer and businessman, mother of four including three sons in service and a 15-year-old daughter, and actively involved for 20 years in New Jersey health and welfare work, was selected from a field of 12 outstanding women recommended by Dean Virginia C. Gildersleeve of Barnard College, Columbia University. Dean Gildersleeve chaired the Advisory Educational Council which had earlier recommended to the Navy the selection of Lieutenant Commander Mildred McAfee, Director of the WAVES.

Colonel Littleton W. T. Waller, Jr., Director of Reserve, and his assistant, Major C. Brewster Rhoads, travelled across the country to interview all candidates personally, and discreet inquiries also were made about the nominees. The Commandant firmly believed the success of the MCWR would depend largely on the character and capabilities of its director. Mrs. Streeter must have seemed an obvious choice. She was confident, spirited, fiercely patriotic, and high-principled. Discussing the interview in later life, she said:

As nearly as I can make out, General Holcomb said, "If I've

got to have women, I've got to have somebody in charge in whom I've got complete confidence." So he called on General Waller. General Waller said, "If I've got to be responsible for the women, I've got to have somebody in whom I have complete confidence." And he called on Major Rhoads. So then the two of them came out to see me.

Having passed muster with both Colonel Waller and Major Rhoads, Mrs. Streeter was scheduled for an interview with General Holcomb. In the course of the first meeting, he asked repeatedly whether she knew

any Marines. Dismayed, and convinced she would be disqualified because she did not know the right people, she answered honestly that she knew no Marines. In fact, this was exactly what the Commandant wanted to hear because he worried that if she had high-ranking friends in the Corps, she might circumvent the chain of command when she couldn't get her way. After the interview, Colonel Waller said he thought it went well, but the appointment still had to be approved by the Secretary of the Navy. That was good news for Mrs. Streeter since Secretary Knox was a close friend of her mother and

Col Streeter poses with two other women's reserve directors: Capt Dorothy Stratton, head of the Coast Guard SPARS, left, and Capt Mildred McAfee, of the WAVES.

Photo courtesy of Mary R. Rich



her in-laws, and her husband had been the Secretary's personal counsel.

Throughout her long life, Ruth Streeter remained a devoted Marine, but the Corps had not been her first choice. After the fall of France in 1940, Mrs. Streeter believed the United States would be drawn into war. In interviews she spoke of German submarines sinking American ships a mile or two off the New Jersey shore, in plain sight of Atlantic City. So, fully intending to be part of the war effort, she learned to fly, earned a commercial pilot's license, and eventually, bought her own small plane. In the summer of 1941 Streeter joined the Civil Air Patrol, and although her plane was used to fly missions aimed at keeping the enemy subs down, to her enormous frustration, she was relegated to the

Capt Henry W. Bransom speaks to a group of WAVES who volunteered to transfer to the Marine Corps and work in

position of adjutant, organizing schedules and doing ". . . all the dirty work."

In later years, retired Colonel Streeter reminisced that British women were flying planes in England early in the war and she expected American women to be organized to ferry planes to Europe. When, at last, the quasi-military Women Air Service Pilots (WASPs) was formed under the leadership of the legendary aviatrix, Jackie Cochran, Mrs. Streeter was 47 years old, 12 years beyond the age limit. Nevertheless, she tried to enlist four times and was rejected four times before she asked to meet Jackie Cochran personally, and then she was rejected the fifth time.

In January 1943, before the public knew about the Marine Corps' plan to enlist women, Mrs. Streeter

recruiting offices, such as this one in Washington, D.C. They wore WAVE uniforms until USMC uniforms were ready.

Photo courtesy of Marine Corps Gazette



for classification and detail, Captain Cornelia D. T. Williams; Women's Reserve representative for West Coast activities, Captain Lillian O'Malley Daly (who had been a Marinette in World War I and personal secretary to the Commandants from that time); Women's Reserve representative for recruit depot, Captain Katherine A. Towle; and Assistant to the Director, MCWR, Captain Helen C. O'Neill.

The somewhat dubious distinction of being last to take women had its benefits. The missteps and problems of the WAACs, WAVES, and SPARS were duly noted and carefully avoided by the Marines, but more significantly, the other services were generous in sharing advice and resources. Right from the beginning, the Navy was a full partner in getting the fledgling MCWR off to a good start.

There was widespread skepticism about whether men could properly select female applicants, so women were sought immediately for recruiting duty. The Navy sounded a call among WAVE officer candidates and 19 volunteers were selected for transfer and assigned to Marine procurement offices where, still dressed in their Navy uniforms, they set to work recruiting the first Marine women.

By agreement between the Navy Bureau of Personnel and Headquarters, Marine Corps, and to avoid competition in the recruiting of women for either naval service, Naval procurement offices were used by Marine procurement sections. Women interested in joining the WAVES or the Marines went to one office to enlist and receive physical examinations. In time, however, the Marine Corps developed its own network of recruiting offices. The official announcement finally came on Saturday, 13 February 1943, and women enthusiastically answered the call to "Be a Marine . . . Free a Man to Fight." Although enlistments were



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 147-81

The first WR recruits to be shipped to New York for training at Hunter College receive instructions from 1st Lt Helen Perrell at Philadelphia's 30th Street Station.

scheduled to begin on the following Monday, the record shows that at least one woman, Lucille E. McClaren of Nemacolin, Pennsylvania, signed up earlier, on 13 February.

Women who aspired to serve as a WR had to meet rather stringent qualifications which prescribed not only their age, education, and state of health, but their marital status as well. At the start, the eligibility requirements were similar for both officers and enlisted women: United States citizenship; not married to a Marine; either single or married but with no children under 18; height not less than 60 inches; weight not less than 95 pounds; good vision and teeth.

For enlisted or "general service," as it was called, the age limits were from 20 to 35, and an applicant was required to have at least two years of high school. For officer candidates, requirements were the same as for WAVES and SPARS: age from 20 to 49; either a college graduate, or a combination of two years of college and two years of work experience.

In time, regulations were relaxed so that the wives of enlisted Marines were allowed to join, and enlisted women could marry after boot camp.

Black women were not specifically barred from the segregated Marine Corps, but on the other hand, they were not knowingly enlisted. While it is rumored that several black women "passed" as white and served in the MCWR, none have been recorded. Officially, the first black women Marines, Annie E. Graham and Ann E. Lamb, arrived at Parris Island for boot training on 10 September 1949.

Early recruiting was so hectic that in some instances, women were sworn in and put directly to work in the procurement offices, delaying military training until later. American women were determined to do their part even if it meant defying the objections of parents, brothers, and boyfriends who tried to keep them from joining up.

Marian Bauer's parents were so shaken at her decision to enlist that they refused to see her off. But then there were the lucky ones like Jane Taylor, who remembers the wise advice from her father, a World War I sailor, "Don't ever complain to me. You're doing this of your own free will. You weren't drafted or forced. Now, go—learn, travel, and do your job to the best of your ability." Zetta Little, the daughter of Salvation

Army officers, joined because, ". . . someone waved a flag and said my brother would come home from the war sooner if I did."

The Marines were serious about the weight limits and just as underweight male enlistees have always done, underweight women devoured bananas washed down with water to bring their weight up to the required 95 pounds. Audrey Bennington, after being rejected by a Navy doctor because she was underweight, left the induction center to gorge herself, and when she returned, the corpsman turned accomplice, looked away as she climbed on the scale clutching her fur coat and shoes. An equally accommodating corpsman rested his foot on the scale and wrote down 95 pounds when diminutive Danelia Wedge was weighed the second time. "Wedgie" got as far as Camp Lejeune but was afraid her military career

was over when a doctor asked what had caused her to lose so much weight since enlistment. He accepted her quick response, "Well, sir, long train rides don't agree with me."

Throughout the war the minimum age, set by law, remained unchanged even though it was sometimes difficult to defend. After all, some teenagers argued, 18-year-old girls were able to enlist in World War I, and even some 17-year-olds joined with their parents' consent. Others wondered why 18-year-old boys could be sent to combat, yet 18-year-old girls could not serve at all.

While some parents fought to keep their girls home, others asked special consideration for daughters who were too young to enlist. One of the most poignant letters came from a World War I holder of the Distinguished Service Cross who wrote to the Commandant in January 1943,

LtCol Streeter welcomes national officers of the Marine Corps League Auxiliary to the WR barracks at Henderson Hall. From left are Mrs. Mabel Murry, LtCol Streeter, Auxiliary President

even before news of the Women's Reserve was announced:

I know this is no time to reminisce, but I do want to bring this to your attention. I am the Marine from 96th Company, Sixth Regiment, who was with Lieutenant [Clifton B.] Cates and a few other Marines that captured Bouresches, France, and I turned over the first German prisoner and machine gun to you that our battalion captured on the night of 6 June 1918. I have a big request to ask . . . As I have no sons to give to the Marines, I would be more than happy if you . . . would recommend my daughter to the newly-formed Marines Women Reserve Corps. While I appreciate that her age may be a little young, she will be 18 this June . . . I

Mrs. Louise Jacobsen, and Mrs. Olyse Marchi. LtCol Streeter never missed an opportunity to reassure civilians that a motherly figure was watching over her women Marines.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 12270



feel sure she could fit into your program . . . surely this is not too much for a D.S.C. ex-Marine to ask of you . . .

Recruiting for the MCWR was almost too successful and one procurement officer, cautioning that the number of applicants so far exceeded the quotas that he feared a backlash of ill will, suggested that publicity be curtailed. Within one month of MCWR existence, while Marine forces regrouped after the campaign for Guadalcanal, and prepared for the move to New Georgia and the advance up the Solomons chain, Colonel Waller reported: "The women of the country have responded in just the manner we expected . . . Thousands of women have volunteered to serve in the Women's Reserve and from them we have already selected more than 1,000 for the enlisted ranks and over 100 as officers."

Naturally, each service wanted to recruit the very best candidates, and the women directors, joined in a singleness of purpose, set aside inter-Service rivalry to get the job done. Typically, the four leaders, Major Streeter; Major Oveta Culp Hobby, WAAC and WAC; Lieutenant Commander Mildred H. McAfee, WAVES; and Lieutenant Commander Dorothy C. Stratton, SPARS, ironed out their differences on recruiting women from the war industries, civil service, and agriculture, and submitted a recommendation to the Joint Army-Navy Personnel Board which eventually became an all-Service policy.

Women working in war industries were discouraged from enlisting, but some were persistent and in the end were required to go to the local office of the United States Employment Service for approval. Civil Service employees needed a written release "without prejudice" from their agency and when a reluctant employer released the employee "with prejudice," none of the Armed Serv-

ices would consider her application for 90 days. Marines went a step further and barred their own civilian women employees who enlisted from working in their original jobs even if classified to a similar military occupational specialty.

Almost immediately, Major Streeter and the public relations officer, Lieutenant Stewart, toured the United States, speaking at many gatherings such as women's clubs and Chambers of Commerce, to explain the purpose of the MCWR and to win public support. A more subtle but equally important reason for the tour and indeed for having a Director of Women's Reserve at all, according to Colonel Streeter, ". . . was because the parents were not going to let their little darlings go in among all these wolves unless they thought that somebody was keeping a motherly eye on them."

Families had good reason to be apprehensive; the early months were difficult for the Women Reservists. Of all the problems, ranging from barracks obviously designed only for male occupancy to the scarcity of uniforms, the most trying were the stares and jeers of the men which in the words of Colonel Katherine A. Towle, second Director of the MCWR, ". . . somehow had to be brazened out."

From the start, the directors of the WACS, WAVES, SPARS, and MCWR focused their energy on the war effort, but it was difficult not to be distracted by the change in attitude of the fickle public whose early enthusiasm for women in uniform gave way to a nasty, demeaning smear campaign that started as a whisper and grew to a roar. The WAAC took the brunt of the abuse and never really recovered. It was so bad that some suggested it might be part of an enemy plot to sabotage the nation's morale. Sadly, a military intelligence investigation showed otherwise.

Nevertheless, the MCWR met its

goal on schedule and reached strength of 18,000 by 1 June 1944. Then, all recruiting stopped for nearly four months and when it was resumed on 20 September 1944, it was on a very limited basis.

Everyone agreed that the MCWR's recruiting success was directly tied to the Marine Corps' reputation – the toughest, the bravest, the most selective. Women like Inga Frederiksen did not hesitate to accept the challenge of joining the best. When a SPAR recruiter told her she was smart not to join the Marines because they were a lot rougher, Inga knew she had to be a Marine.

Early Training: Holyoke and Hunter

Thanks to the Navy, officer training began when the MCWR was only one month old. Sharing training facilities saved time and precious manpower in getting the women out and on the job. Moreover, Marines benefitted from the Navy's close relationship with a group of prominent women college presidents, deans, and civic leaders who gave sound advice based on years of experience with women's programs. Just as important they offered several prestigious college campuses for WAVE and subsequently, MCWR training.

The Navy's Midshipmen School for women officers, established at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts, later branched out to nearby Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley. Enlisted women were trained at Hunter College in New York City, and without question, the distinguished reputations of these two institutions enhanced the public image of the WAVES and the women Marines.

The first group of 71 Marine officer candidates arrived at the U.S. Midshipmen School (Women's Reserve) at Mount Holyoke on 13 March 1943. The women Marines were formed into companies under the command of a male officer,



The last class of WRs to graduate from boot camp at Hunter College, The Bronx, are at the far end of the formation of Marines and WAVES held on the grounds of Columbia University.

Photo courtesy of Evelyn Wallman Gins
ty. Between 27 March and 10 July 1943, more than 3,000 women Marines were fully trained at Hunter before all MCWR schools were moved to Camp Lejeune later that year.

Major E. Hunter Hurst, but, similar to Marine detachments on board ships, the WR unit was part of the WAVES school complement, under final authority of the commanding officer of the Midshipmen School.

Officer candidates joined as privates and after four weeks, if successful, were promoted to officer cadet, earning the right to wear the coveted silver OC pins. At that point women who failed to meet the standards were given two options: transfer to Hunter College to complete basic enlisted training or go home to await eventual discharge. Cadets who completed the eight-week course but were not recommended for a commission were asked to submit their resignations to the Commandant. In time, they were discharged, but permitted to reenlist as privates unless they were overage.

A disappointment shared by members of the first Officer Candidates' Class (OCC) and recruit class was the scarcity of uniforms. Both trained for several weeks in civilian clothes because uniform deliveries were so

slow. In fact, the official photo of the first platoon to graduate from boot camp at Hunter College is a masterful bit of innocent deceit because as Audrey L. Bennington tells it, "Only the girls in the first row—and a few in the second row—had skirts on. We in the other rows had jackets, shirts, ties and caps, but—NO skirts. Lord and Taylor was a bit late in getting skirts to you."

Recruits received very precise and clear instructions before leaving home. They were told to bring raincoat and rain hat (no umbrellas), lightweight dresses or suits, plain bathrobe, soft-soled bedroom slippers, easily laundered underwear, play suit or shorts for physical education (no slacks), and comfortable dark brown, laced oxfords because, ". . . experience has proven that drilling tends to enlarge the feet." They were also warned not to leave home without orders, not to arrive before the exact time and date stamped on the orders, and not to forget their ration cards.

During the first four weeks the

MCWR curriculum was identical to that of the WAVES, except for drill which was taught by reluctant male drill instructors transferred to Mount Holyoke from the Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Parris Island, South Carolina. Officer candidates studied naval organization and administration, naval personnel, naval history and strategy, naval law and justice, and ships and aircraft. The second phase of training was devoted to Marine Corps subjects taught by male Marines and later, as they, themselves became trained, WR officers. This portion of training was conducted apart from the WAVES and included subjects such as Marine Corps administration and courtesies, map reading, interior guard, safeguarding military information, and physical conditioning.

On 6 April, members of the first officer class received their OC pins and on 4 May history was made as the first women ever became commissioned officers in the Marine Corps. Retired Colonel Julia E. Hamblet, who twice served as a Director

of Women Marines, recalled the comical reactions she and other women of the first officers class received: "That first weekend, we were also mistaken for Western Union girls."

The Marine Corps section of the Midshipmen School operated on a two-part overlapping schedule, with a new class arriving each month. The first three classes each received seven-and-a-half weeks of training. In all, 214 women officers completed OCC training at Mount Holyoke.

Meanwhile, Headquarters, Marine Corps, was making plans to consolidate all MCWR training at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, by 30 June. The women of the fourth Officer Candidates' Class reported to Mount Holyoke on 5 June, were promoted to cadet on the 29th, boarded troop trains for the two-day trip to Camp Lejeune on 1 July, and finally graduated on 7 August.

Two weeks after the first officer class reported to Mount Holyoke, en-

listed women were ordered to the U.S. Naval Training School (Women's Reserve), at Hunter College in The Bronx, New York City. Seven hundred twenty-two "boots" arrived in three increments between 24 and 26 March and were billeted in nearby apartment houses. On the 26th, 21 platoons of women Marines began training with the WAVES and on 25 April they graduated. Since the school was designed for WAVE indoctrination, the curriculum was largely geared for the Navy. Some subjects were clearly not pertinent for Marines, so modifications were made and once again reluctant male Marines were pulled from Parris Island to be instructors. Training sessions varied from three and a half to five weeks and besides the dreaded physical examinations, time was allotted for uniforming, drill, physical training, and lectures on customs and courtesies, history and organization, administration, naval law, map reading, interior guard, defense against

chemical attack, defense against air attack, identification of aircraft, and safeguarding military information.

Between 26 March and 10 July 1943, six classes of recruits, of approximately 525 each, arrived incrementally every two weeks. Of the 3,346 women who began recruit training at Hunter, 3,280 graduated.

And again, as at Mount Holyoke, separate Marine companies were formed into a battalion under the command of a regular officer, Major William W. Buchanan, who reported to Navy Captain William F. Amsden, commanding officer of the school. Captain Katharine A. Towle, who had been specifically recruited from the University of California at Berkeley and commissioned directly from civilian life without any Marine training, was Major Buchanan's senior woman staff officer. Actually, she was the only woman Marine officer at Hunter until the first officers' candidate class was commissioned. The rest of the Marine Corps staff included 33 male instructors—10 officers and 23 enlisted men—to teach classroom subjects to the Marine women and 15 to 20 male drill instructors to supervise the close order drill of all "boots," WAVES and Marines.

Captain Towle, destined to be the second director of the MCWR and the first Director of Women Marines after passage of the Women's Armed Forces Integration Act of 1948, described her indoctrination into the Corps in a 1969 interview:

No one could have been greener or less military than I in those early days. I even came aboard the school in my civilian clothes. My uniforms were still in the process of being tailored for me in New York. I could tie the four-in-hand uniform tie for my uniform khaki shirt, but that was about all. I was soon, however, to learn basic procedures under the kind and watchful tutelage of the Marine

The 1st Platoon, U.S. Naval Training School (Women's Reserve), gathered at Hunter College in New York City, April 1943. Because uniform shipments were delayed, only the women in the first row and a few in the second wore uniform skirts.

Photo courtesy of Audrey L. Bennington





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 310463
Col Katherine A. Towle, second director of the Women's Reserve and first post-war Director of Women Marines, was a dean at the University of California, Berkeley, before entering the Marine Corps.

Corps detachment's sergeant major, a Marine of some thirty years' service. He really must have had some bad moments.

What you will do when you're a good Marine, is really something. Every day for the first week he would escort me to a quiet room away from curious eyes (which was just as well) and give me instructions in how to salute properly, as well as other helpful lessons on what was expected of a Marine Corps officer. And I shall certainly always be grateful to Sergeant Major [Halbert A.] McElroy . . . for helping to make a proper officer out of me. He really personified the pride of being a Marine and he soon indoctrinated me with this same feeling. I was determined, no matter what happened, not to let him down after he had spent so much time on me, and I don't believe I really ever did.

Training: Camp Lejeune

Planners originally thought to use existing Navy resources and facilities for all MCWR recruiting and train-

ing, but Marines soon saw the advantage of having their own schools. It wasn't only that Mount Holyoke and Hunter Colleges were overcrowded and stretched beyond reasonable limits by the number of women arriving every week. There was a larger motive for moving MCWR schools to Camp Lejeune and, simply, it was the famed Marine *esprit de corps*. Camp Lejeune, where thousands of Marines were preparing for deployment overseas was the largest Marine training base on the East Coast and offered sobering opportunities for the women to observe field exercises and weapons demonstrations, and to see the faces of the young men they would free to fight.

Major Hurst, commanding officer of the Marine Detachment at Mount Holyoke, understood almost immediately the drawbacks of trying to indoctrinate and train Marines in such patently civilian surroundings as a college campus. Less than a month after training began he wrote Brigadier General Waller:

In drawing these up [training schedules], I found myself wish-

The headquarters of the Women's Reserve Schools at Camp Lejeune supervised the recruit training of more than 18,000 women during the course of World War II.

Photo courtesy of Mary R. Rich



ing more and more that we could include some weapons instructions, at least pistol, for our women . . . I have found that the women come into the Marine Corps expecting to learn to shoot and I, of course, would like to see them become the first women's reserve in the country to take up the specialty of their men if Headquarters considers the idea at all feasible. I wouldn't have had the nerve to suggest it if Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt hadn't asked me on her visit last week how soon they were going to learn to shoot. She expressed surprise at learning that the women of the U.S. were not learning as much about weapons as the women of other countries . . .

Nearly a half century later, the retired 23d Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Wallace M. Greene, Jr., expressed a like sentiment when he wrote in 1990:

I commenced to realize the meaning of sexism in the armed



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 6180

WR recruit Mary C. Harris learns first-hand about a carbine from GySgt Daniel Carroll, a member of Edson's Raiders recently returned from the Southwest Pacific. WRs were the only military women to receive combat training during boot camp.

forces while I was a Marine Corps observer with the British army during the Battle for Britain. During a night bombing raid against London, I watched the women gunners in an antiaircraft battery battle the incoming German planes. I suddenly asked myself, "Why aren't our women—able, loyal, and patriotic as they are—permitted to participate in this fashion?"

The Marine Corps Women's Reserve Schools—officer candidate and boot training along with certain specialist schools—opened in July 1943 under the command of Colonel John M. Arthur. Officer candidates and recruits in training at Mount Holyoke and Hunter Colleges were transferred to Camp Lejeune, New River, North Carolina, where nearly 19,000 women became Marines during World War II.

Just one month before the MCWR schools opened, Major Streeter asked that weapons demonstrations be made a regular part of the curricula. Frankly, she wasn't satisfied with

mere classroom lectures on combat equipment, landing operations, and tactics so she tactfully suggested:

If it is possible to arrange transportation and schedules that would not interrupt the training of the men in these lines of work, I believe it would be a definite inspiration to the Marine Corps Women's Reserve to see them actually in training.

As usual, her instincts were right on target and the envious WRs attended two half-day sessions observing demonstrations in hand-to-hand combat, use of mortars, bazookas, flame-throwers, guns of all sorts, amtracs, and landing craft.

The recruits traveled to Wilmington, North Carolina, on women Marine troop trains of about 500, commanded by a woman lieutenant and two enlisted assistants. They arrived at the depot as civilians, but the transition to Marines began immediately. The women were lined up, issued paper armbands identifying them as Marine "boots," ordered to pick up luggage—anybody's lug-

gage—anybody's—and marched aboard the train. The process accelerated at the other end where they were met by shouting NCOs who herded them into crowded buses to be taken to austere, forbidding barracks with large, open squadbays, group shower rooms, toilet stalls without doors, and urinals.

The women were quartered in the red brick barracks in Area One set aside for the exclusive use of the women's schools. Their patriotism and idealism was sorely tested and some readily admit they cried when they realized what they had done. Others wondered why they had done it at all. There was, however, no time in the schedule for adjustment. General processing, medical examinations, uniforming, and classification tests and interviews to assess abilities, education, training, and work experience were top priority. Orientation classes and close order drill were scheduled for the first day and a strict training regimen kicked off with 0545 reveille.

One thing hadn't changed from the days at Mount Holyoke and Hunter—the male DIs weren't happy. Shaping up a gaggle of "BAMs" ("broad-assed Marines") was not what they wanted to do with a war going on. Feeling the scornful scrutiny of fellow Marines, it seemed that the DIs took on a touch more bravado than they dared on the college campuses. One boot felt the DIs resented the women, ". . . more than a battalion of Japanese troops." She was probably right.

For the first year, at least, many male Marines didn't take the trouble to disguise their resentment. Disregarding the Commandant's wishes about nicknames, some Marines visibly enjoyed embarrassing the WRs with the derogatory label, BAMs. Some women took it in their stride, but it became tiresome and many were furious. When the famous bandleader, Fred Waring, referred to the WRs as BAMs, a con-



Photo courtesy of Raelyn Harman Subramanian

To the WR recruits, uniform shortages were routine in the early days. Rose M. Nigro, one of the five women in the author's family who served with the women Marines in World War II, and Betty Hall, had a long wait for a full issue. Here they wear recruit badges, oxfords, and caps at boot camp at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina.

tingent got up and walked out during a performance at Camp Lejeune.

Marjorie Ann Curtner recalled a particularly mean-spirited stunt engineered by a group of Seabees who corralled every stray dog in the area, shaved them like poodles, painted "BAM" on their sides, and set them free to roam the ranks of a graduating WR platoon.

For the first time in their lives, many of the women experienced the hurtful sting of coarse epithets as men vented their feelings about the Corps taking "niggers, dogs, and women." Crude language and blatant

disdain took its toll on the morale of the Women's Reserve and its director, causing the Commandant to take steps to end it. In August 1943, he sent a clear message, fixing responsibility for change on unit commanding officers when he wrote:

Information reaching this Headquarters indicates that some . . . officers and men of the Marine Corps treat members of the Women's Reserve with disrespect . . . Coarse or even obscene remarks are being made without restraint by male

Marines in post exchanges, moving picture houses, and other places in the hearing of members of the Women's Reserve . . . This conduct . . . indicates a laxity in discipline which will not be tolerated. Commanding officers will be held responsible . . .

By mid-1944 open hostility gave way to some sort of quiet truce and it wasn't long before the women's competence, self-assurance, sharp appearance, and pride won over a good many of their heretofore detractors. It was put in perspective by a young corporal wounded at Guadalcanal: "Well, I'll tell you. I was kinda sore about it (the women Marines) at first. Then it began to make sense—though only if the girls are gonna be tops, understand." And, in time, Marines could even be counted on to take on soldiers and sailors who dared to harass WRs in their presence.

In September 1943, the first female hometown platoon, made up entirely of women from Philadelphia reported for boot camp. The public relations gimmick of forming a platoon of women recruited from the same area and sending them to training as a unit caught on quickly and on 10 November, the 168th birthday of the Marine Corps, the Potomac Platoon of women from Washington, D.C., and the first of two WR platoons from Pittsburgh were sworn in at fitting ceremonies.

Seventeen more hometown platoons followed; from Albany, Buffalo (two), and Central New York; Pittsburgh, Johnstown, Fayette County, and Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania; Dallas and Houston, Texas; Miami, Florida; St. Paul, Minnesota; Green Bay, Wisconsin; Seattle, Washington; the state of Alabama; northern New England; and southern New England. Each platoon was ordered to duty en masse, completed boot training together, and after-

wards, received individual orders to specialist schools or duty.

From 15 March 1943 until 15 September 1945, 22,199 women were ordered to recruit training and of these, 21,597 graduated. The remaining 602 were separated for medical reasons or because they were found unable to adapt to military life.

All women in the early Officer Candidates' Classes were Class VI(a) reservists recruited directly from civilian life without the advantage of enlisted experience. Consequently, for the first seven Officer Candidate Classes, the primary emphasis was on attitude adjustment, forming new habits, learning the Marine Corps "way," and adopting a military perspective. Close order drill was used to instill discipline and teach the women to respond to orders with precision. To their dismay, old salts found that the renowned tactics famous for making Marines out of civilians weren't working very well with women: shouting, "reading off," and threats were virtually useless. The methods were changed eventually, but only after the original staff members were removed. Colonel

Outstanding "boot," PFC Mary C. Harris, earned an immediate appointment to Officer Candidates Class at Camp Lejeune in December 1943. Officer Candidate (OC) pins were earned after four weeks of successful officer training.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 6164



Marine Corps Historical Collection

On 13 February 1944, "Col Mike," the mascot of the Central Procurement Division in Chicago, tells 2dLt Florence Bailey what it was like in the Old Corps. The "Free a Marine to Fight" recruiting poster in the background has a portrait of a woman Marine painted by famed artist Douglas Crockwell. The original painting hung in the office of the Director of Women Marines until the billet was abolished in 1977.

Streeter lamented that the problem was never satisfactorily resolved since there were so few experienced officers on hand to work on it and there was no time for experimentation.

For approximately seven months, from December 1943 to June 1944, the Officer Training School ran on a three-block plan with two candidates' classes and a post-commissioning course, Reserve Officer Class (ROC), meeting at the same time. Each class of about 60 was organized into a company of two platoons, with a company commander and two platoon leaders. As the manpower crunch waned and the goal of 18,000 women was reached, the three-block system gave way to two-block in June 1944, with one officer candidate class and one ROC in session concurrently. A single-block plan was adopted

in January 1945 and continued until the school closed on 15 October.

A significant change occurred when, in July 1943, commissioned status was opened to enlisted women to take advantage of their experience, and at the same time, build morale and *esprit de corps*. To be eligible, a Marine had to complete six months service, be recommended by her commanding officer, and be selected by a board of male and female officers convened at Headquarters, Marine Corps. The eighth officer class, in October 1943, was made up of both Class VI(a) and Class VI(b) reservists — the latter being Women's Reserve enlisted. Thereafter, the majority of new women officers came from the ranks and from that point on, only civilian women with critical, specialized skills or excep-



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 7184

Capt B. E. Tucker, Sgt Rita Schwartz, PFC Jeanette Walker, and PFC Jane Russell are shown in the fuselage of a Link Trainer, with the celestial dome in the background. By August 1944, WRs conducted all courses of Link instruction at Cherry Point.

tional leadership qualities were accepted for Marine officer training.

Reserve Officer's Class

Commissioning large numbers of NCOs caused the MCWR to shift the focus from making Marines out of civilian women to making officers out of enlisted women. An entirely new attitude and point of view was called for and this led to the creation of the Reserve Officer Class (ROC) for the newly commissioned officers in early December 1943.

It was meant to be a two-week introduction to life as an officer, but, almost immediately it was lengthened to four weeks to broaden the students' perspective and lessen the pressures that built up during basic

officer training. Classes were less formal, privileges and responsibilities were given, and rational problem solving was stressed. The ROC staff tried to teach the new officers what they, if anyone, should have already known: toughness and threats are poor substitutes for firmness and motivation.

The staff revised and refined the course content for several months until finally, by the end of the third ROC, it was satisfied. Experienced officers from Camp Lejeune, nearby posts and stations, and Headquarters, Marine Corps augmented the regular staff. Outside speakers such as the Red Cross field director, the chaplain, and post psychiatrist

described how they could assist line officers. ROC was immensely successful, principally because it was so practical, and even experienced MCWR officers, especially those who had been working in limited fields such as recruiting, were sent for advanced training.

Nine hundred sixty-five women, including the 11 with direct commissions and the 19 transferred from the WAVES at the start, were eventually commissioned in the Marine Corps Reserve. Of the 589 Class VI(a) reservists who began officer training, 72 or 12 percent were dropped and of the 641 Class VI(b) reservists selected from the ranks, 223 or 35 percent were not commissioned.

Specialist Schools

From the very beginning, selected officers and enlisted women were given specialist training and by the end of the war, 9,641 women – 8,914 enlisted and 727 officers – attended schools run by civilians, the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps. The earliest Navy courses were: Aviation Machinist's Mate at the Naval Training School, Memphis, Tennessee; Link Training Instructor at the Naval Air Station, Atlanta, Georgia; and Aviation Storekeeper at Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana. The first Marine Corps schools opened to women were: cooks and bakers, motor transport, quartermaster, and non-commissioned officers. After graduation from OCC at Mount Holyoke, several officers were sent to the Navy's Communications School in South Hadley.

All in all, by the end of the war women attended some 30 specialist schools and the variety is a testament to the dramatic shift in thinking on what women could do: first sergeant, paymaster, signal, parachute rigger, aerographer, clerical, control tower operator, aerial gunnery instructor, celestial navigation, motion picture operator/technician, aircraft instruments technician, radio operator,



An aviation mechanic works on airplane engines



Woman Marine transmits final weather report to pilots



Sensitive gyroscopic instruments are repaired by experts



Riggers packing parachutes at parachutist's school



On duty in the Women's Reserve uniform shop



Receiving radio messages at Marine Corps air station



Operating litho-press at New River



Serving in a Marine aviation control tower

The photographs in this collage show various duties given to WRs assigned to aviation units.

radio material teletypewriter, post exchange, uniform shop, automotive mechanic, carburetor and ignition, aviation supply, and photography.

Uniforms

The basic wardrobe was pretty much chosen before the public announcement of the Marine Corps Women's Reserve. In mid-December 1942, the Commandant asked that Mrs. Anne Adams Lentz, an employee of the War Department, be assigned to Headquarters "for a period of approximately 30 days." Before the war, Mrs. Lentz worked in the school uniform department of a large New York City retail store, and then for eight months she assisted the WAACS with the design of their uni-

form. Action on the Commandant's letter was swift and Mrs. Lentz came on board in early January. After a preliminary consultation with the Depot Quartermaster in Philadelphia, she went to New York to oversee the design and construction of model uniforms for the Women's Reserve by the Women's Garment Manufacturers of New York. The Commandant's guidance was specific; he wanted the women dressed in the traditional Marine forest green with red chevrons and he insisted they look like Marines as much as possible. This was in stark contrast to the Navy which denied its women the privilege of wearing gold braid throughout the war.

Before her 30-day assignment ex-

pired, Mrs. Lentz decided to become a Marine, and became the first Woman Reservist when she was sworn in as a captain on 15 January 1943. The oath of office was administered by her husband, Brigadier General John M. Lentz, USA, who was attached to the Army Ground Forces Headquarters in Washington, D.C.

On 11 June 1943, a Uniform Unit was created as part of the Women's Reserve Section at Marine Corps Headquarters to arrange for uniforming enlistees when assigned to active duty, replenishing clothing from time to time, and planning for future needs. Soon after, on 17 June, the Marine Corps Women's Reserve Uniform Board was established to suggest articles of clothing and make



For a publicity photograph, the women of Company H, 2d Headquarters Battalion, Henderson Hall, model the various work and dress uniforms worn by women Marines during the

course of World War II. From left are PFC Florence Miller, Cpl Lois Koester, Cpl Carol Harding, Sgt Violet Salela, Cpl Grace Steinmetz, Cpl Rose Mazur, and PFC Mary Swiderski.

recommendations to the Commandant. The original uniform regulations were published in August 1943 after approvals from the Uniform Board, the Commandant, and the Secretary of the Navy. But, this was not an issue so easily settled and a final version reflecting numerous changes, modifications, and additions, was reissued on 30 April 1945 as *Uniform Regulations, U.S. Marine Women's Reserve, 1945*. These regulations remained in force and the uniforms of women Marines changed very little until a new wardrobe was designed by the French couturier, Mainbocher, in 1952.

Officers were paid a uniform allowance and gratuity of \$250 and enlisted women received \$200. With this the women bought two winter

uniforms, hats, shoes, summer outfits, a purse, wool-lined raincoat, specified accessories, and undergarments. To make certain that the carefully designed uniforms looked exactly as intended and met the Corps' high standards, 13 women officers were ordered to a six-week intensive training session where they were drilled in the techniques of tailoring, alterations, clothing construction, and fitting before being assigned to uniform shops run by the post exchanges at major Marine Corps posts throughout the country.

The seemingly excessive attention to the women's uniforms reflected not only the Corps' well known concern with appearance, but it showed an astute appreciation of the problems encountered by the other services.

The early WAAC uniform, for example, had been designed over a man's suit form with broad shoulders, no bosom, and slender hips. Although the prototype looked just fine, the real thing caused endless problems.

Unfortunately, the Marine Corps Women's Reserve adopted the WAVES' flawed system of supply and distribution, selling clothing manufactured by various firms at a 10 percent mark-up to retail stores and then reselling it at a 30 percent mark-up to the Women Reservists. The arrangement was abandoned within a year because the prices were excessive, shortages were the rule, and the women refused to pay for uniform items with defects—no matter how minor. The latter problem caused a log jam which would have

been avoided if uniforms were simply issued with no arguments allowed.

Major reform was called for and on 16 February 1944, the Uniform Unit of the Women's Reserve Section, Reserve Division, Procurement Branch was transferred to the Office of the Quartermaster General and became the Women's Reserve Section, Supply Division, Quartermaster Department. The first action was to terminate all retail agreements and take responsibility for uniforming away from post exchanges.

Then, in August, four women officers became inspectors, visiting manufacturers and doing whatever they could to expedite the fulfillment of contracts. But despite the several organizational changes and system modifications, in her final report at the war's end, Colonel Streeter wrote, ". . . the supply of MCWR clothing was one of the few problems to which a satisfactory solution had not been found at the time that demobilization of the Women's Reserve began."

Col Katherine A. Towle, second director of the Marine Corps Women's Reserve, inspects WRs wearing winter service green at MCRD, Parris Island, in 1945.

Photo courtesy of Sarah Thornton



On one point everyone agreed: all matters of supply of the women's uniforms should have been handled as it was for enlisted men.

Style

Tailored femininity was the goal, and by all accounts, it was achieved. The widespread and enthusiastic approval of the attractive uniforms gave everyone's morale a big lift, especially because once on active duty, Marines could not wear civilian clothing even on liberty. Colonel Streeter was especially proud of their appearance and demeanor. In her words, "You know, they had a certain reserve. They always looked well. They held themselves well. They had a certain dignity. And that was each one of them . . . "

The MCWR uniform mirrored what was worn by all Marines in color and style, but was cut from a lighter-weight cloth. Generally, officers and enlisted women wore identically styled uniforms of the same fabric: this was not true of male



Department of Defense Photos (USMC) 7416
2d Lt Elizabeth McKinnon, left, wears the summer service uniform with detachable green officer's epaulets added so that rank insignia could be seen more easily.

Marines. Women officers wore green, detachable epaulets on the shoulder straps of summer uniforms and had additional dress uniforms. For dress, they wore the Marine officers' traditional gilt and silver emblems and the enlisted women wore the gilt emblems of enlisted Marines. Both wore the bronze eagle, globe, and anchor on their service uniforms, but positioned it differently. While the vertical axis of the hemisphere paralleled the crease line of the jacket collar for officers, it was worn perpendicular to the floor by enlisted women. Coats, caps, shoes, gloves, handbags, and mufflers were the same for all ranks. Enlisted women wore the same large chevrons as the men.

Winter Service Uniform

Officers and enlisted women wore a forest green, serge man-tailored jacket and straight, six-gore skirt during the colder seasons. A long-sleeved khaki shirt with four-in-hand necktie, green cap, brown shoes and gloves, and bronze metal buttons completed the outfit. Women Reservists were easily recognized by their unique, visored bell-crowned hat, trimmed with a lipsick-red cord which set them apart from the



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 13024
Pvt Anna K. Peterson, a clerk in the Family Allowance Section at Headquarters, Marine Corps, enlisted to help shorten the war so that her Navy husband could return as soon as possible. The fabric of her seersucker summer service uniform was selected for comfort.

WACs, WAVES, and SPARS whose hats closely resembled one another. They had a heavy green overcoat or khaki trenchcoat with detachable lining, always worn with a red muffler in winter. All women Marines owned black galoshes, boots, or rubbers to fit the unpopular, but comfortable oxfords.

Officer Winter Dress

Women Marines did not have a dress blue uniform until 1952. During World War II and for the seven years following, officers turned their winter service outfit into a dress uniform with a white shirt and forest green tie in place of the routine khaki. Enlisted women had no comparable dress option.

Summer Service

The summer service uniform, a distinct departure from tradition, was a two-piece green and white seersucker or plisse dress. The fabric was specially selected by Captain Lentz for its comfort and laundering ease. V-necked and fastened with white or green plastic buttons, the jacket was available with short or long sleeves. The first summer hat, a round cap with a snap brim, was short-lived and was replaced by one styled after the winter hat, but in spruce green

with white cap cord and bronze buttons. Later a garrison-style cap in the same light green shade and trimmed with white piping was added. Shoes, oxfords, or pumps, were brown and a white rayon muffler was worn with the trenchcoat. When it was realized that officer rank insignia could not be seen on the striped dress, green shoulder boards were added and they were fastened to the epaulets by the shoulder strap button and the rank insignia.

Summer Dress

The hands-down favorite uniform of all World War II WRs was the short-sleeved, V-necked white twill uniform worn with gilt buttons on the jacket and cap, dress emblems,

Pvt Billie J. Redding married her hometown beau, Navy Ens William A. Lewis, in a military wedding in San Diego. The bride and her maid of honor, Helen Taylor, violated uniform regulations by wearing corsages on their white dress uniforms.

Photo courtesy of Billie J. Redding Lewis



and white pumps. The stiffly starched uniform never failed to evoke compliments. Enlisted women were disheartened when, after the war, because enlisted men had no equivalent uniform, it was discontinued.

Officer Summer Dress

Officers could choose among three summer dress uniforms: the white one worn by the enlisted women but with added green shoulder straps, summer dress "B," and summer undress "C." The latter two, made of white twill, worsted, or palm beach material were worn with a short-sleeved white blouse, and without a necktie or green shoulder straps. The "C" uniform was long sleeved and



Photo courtesy of Barbara Baker Rosinski

WRs Arlene Wilson and Barbara Baker model work and dress versions of the summer uniform. For dress, a bright green cotton cover was used over the purse.

collarless. On these two uniforms, the officers wore their dress emblems not on the collar as usual, but on their epaulets, near the armhole seams, and they centered the rank insignia between the emblem and epau-let button. One WR reminisced that even a lieutenant looked like a four-star general with so much metal on her shoulders.

Handbags, Shoes, and Hose

Women Marines had only one handbag, a brown, rough textured leather purse with a shoulder strap and spring closure. They learned to wear it over their left shoulder, leav-

ing their right hand free to salute. The same brown bag became a bright summer accessory with the addition of a removable, spruce green, cotton purse cover and matching shoulder strap. Everyone wore dark brown, smooth leather oxfords or pumps with the winter service uniform and similar white pumps for dress in the summer. The dress pumps, with heels between one and one-half and two inches high, were trimmed with a flat bow.

Ladylike and fashionable full-length, beige, seamed stockings were de rigueur with all service and dress uniforms and cotton hose was worn

in ranks. Since nylon, rayon, and silk stockings were rationed because of wartime shortages, some women in other services were allowed to use leg makeup, but not women Marines.

Utilities and Exercise Suits

Covert slacks were worn for cer-tain duties, but the most common work uniform was the olive-drab, cotton utility uniform worn with the clumsy, heavy, high-topped shoes known as boondockers. The trousers with a bib front and long, crossed straps were worn over a short-sleeved, matching shirt or white tee shirt and topped by a long-sleeved jacket. Enlisted women stenciled their rank on the shirt and jacket sleeves.

For recreation, field nights, and physical conditioning, women Ma-rines wore the "peanut suit," so named because of its color and crinkled appearance. It was a tan, seer-sucker, one-piece, bloomer outfit with ties at the bottom of the shorts. In keeping with prevailing standards of propriety, the women modestly covered their legs with a front-buttoned A-lined skirt when not ac-tively engaged in sports, exercise, or work details.

Grooming, Handkerchiefs, and Undergarments

One of the first lessons learned by the women Marines was that there were rules for everything. Lipstick and nail polish could be worn, and in fact were encouraged, but the color absolutely had to harmonize with the red cap cord of the winter cap, regardless of the season. The favorite color was Montezuma Red, designed in their honor. Rouge, mas-cara, and hair coloring were per-mitted, but had to be inconspicuous. Realistically, it was nearly impos-sible for a woman to tint or bleach her hair because the color had to match the information on her identification card. The regulations favored femi-nine hair styles with hair neither too short nor too long; by directive, hair could touch, but not cover the collar.



Pvt Eleanor Nocito, in dungarees and snap brim hat, served at MCAS, El Toro.

Not even something as personal as underwear escaped strict regulation. Bras and girdles—whether needed or not—and full length white slips were always worn underneath the service and dress uniforms. Handkerchiefs could be khaki when the khaki shirt was worn, otherwise, they had to be white.

Hair ornaments were forbidden and the only jewelry allowed were simple rings and wrist watches.

The uniforms were fashionable and admired and thankfully belied the never-ending logistical problems surrounding their design, specifications, sizing, inspections, supply, and distribution.

A woman Marine bicycles at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, in a seersucker "peanut suit," named for its beige, crinkly fabric and bloomer legs, and worn for its comfort.

Photo courtesy of Raelyn Harman Subramanian



*Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 301456
Cpl Constance H. Bacon, a bank teller before the war, worked as an auditor in the Paymaster Department, Headquarters, Marine Corps. On her fingernails is regulation "Lipstick Red" nail polish, which was formulated to match the red cap cord of the winter service uniform.*

Classification-Detail-Transfer

In 1943 the country desperately needed womanpower, but almost no one knew for certain just how far the limits of tradition could be stretched or, more likely, breached. By custom, working women were mainly employed in offices, classrooms, hospitals, retail stores, libraries, beauty shops, or in homes as domestics. Not many women drove trucks, or buses, and they certainly didn't fix them. Women did not work in the trades—plumbing, electricity, carpentry—and



Photo courtesy of Sarah Thornton

Women drivers and mechanics comprised the Motor Transport Section at Parris Island in 1944.

they rarely supervised men. Society had long since deemed certain jobs too dirty, too dangerous, too strenuous, or for unspecified reasons, just not suitable for women.

In this social climate, the Marine Corps set out to select, train, classify, and assign 18,000 newly recruit-

ed civilian women at the rate of more than 1,000 a month, and have them on the job and making a contribution in the shortest time possible. That it was done as magnificently as it was is a tribute both to the women who made it happen and to the men who allowed it to happen.

Colonel Streeter's philosophy was ". . . anything except heavy lifting and combat. They could try."

One of the first WR officers, Captain Cornelia Williams, with a doctoral degree in psychology from the University of Minnesota and wide experience as a college administrator

Women Marines worked in the office of the Sergeant Major of the Schools Training Regiment at Camp Lejeune in August 1944.

Pencil sketch by Marion A. Allen in Marine Corps Art Collection



Marion A. Allen
9-25-44



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 6265

Cpl Essie Lucas and PFC Betty J. Ayers, graduates of Motor Transport School, replace a reconditioned engine at Camp Lejeune's post garage in 1943. Lucas was commissioned six years later in the first postwar Women's Officer Training Class.

in student personnel work, reported to Headquarters on 19 February 1943 for duty in the Classification Division, Detail Branch. Her task seemed simple enough: come up with a plan that balanced the new Marines' skills and abilities against the needs of the Marine Corps. Initially, Marines studied the systems used by the WACs and the WAVES, but in the end, the answer was found closer to home and the preferred plan was based directly on the system already set up for male Marines.

On 1 January 1944, the original arrangement which involved three women officers working in various divisions of the Detail Branch was changed, and a separate Women's Reserve Section of the Detail Branch was organized. Beyond analyzing jobs and translating the duties into military occupational titles and compiling a directory of training courses, its mission was to design the Women's Reserve Qualification Card

(NAVMC-940 C), write appropriate instructions for maintaining it, select classification tests to be given all Women Reservists, plan for selection and training of women classification specialists, and train people in the field in the basics of the classification process.

For the most part, there was little difference in the methods and procedures used to classify officers and enlisted women: the same tests were used for both. In the case of officers, however, closer attention was paid to assessing personality traits and probability of success as leaders and supervisors. While male officers could reasonably expect to be assigned at the bottom rung of an organization, working under the watchful eye and care of experienced senior officers and non-commissioned officers, women officers had neither senior role models nor seasoned non-coms to guide them. It was a sink-or-swim situation where they faced the

prospect of teaching and supervising women as green as themselves.

At first, the basic test battery chosen included the Army standardized tests to assess general learning, mechanical, and clerical ability. From September 1943 through May 1944, the Army Radio Operators Aptitude Test was given to all enlisted women. In June, a test of vocational and job interests was added, and finally in December 1944, when the decision was made to send selected women Marine volunteers to Hawaii, personality and adjustment tests were added.

Once again, just as had happened in the early phases of training, because this was a start-up operation with no women experienced in classification, male Marines ran the system until WRs were qualified to take over. With classes of about 500 boots each arriving at the recruit depot every two weeks, the challenge of matching the women to critical job openings was ambitious enough, but the novelty of using females to fill military titles caused more than a few miscues.

It just wasn't the same as it was with the men who were transferred from boot camp to their first duty station in large troop drafts, based on the theory that most military skills had to be learned by all. In contrast, women were transferred with their names linked to identified job vacancies because many possessed unique skills. The idea was sound, but its success depended upon a cooperative adjutant at the receiving station assigning the women as planned. If, for example, a woman was classified as a telephone operator and arrived at a post only to be assigned by the G-1 as a soda jerk in the post exchange, the process broke down.

The Marine recruiting brochures in 1943 promised women openings in 34 job assignments: the shortsightedness of the planners can be seen in the final statistics recording women in more than 200.

Miscalculations led to bothersome reassessments when newly identified, high-priority jobs had to be filled but qualified women were no longer available. For example, the first calls for IBM tabulating machine operators, teletypewriter operators, sewing machine operators, draftsmen, utility repairmen, and even telephone operators came only after many women with this kind of civilian training and experience had been assigned to other duties.

Expensive errors in judgment were made because no one knew exactly how many women were needed and Marines underestimated their skills and efficiency. Marines requested far too many women, especially for

office work at Headquarters, because they thought that half again as many women were needed to replace a given number of men. For clerical work, the reverse was generally true. Worse, in the time-honored tradition of the Corps, Marines often asked for twice as many women as were needed, expecting to receive half of what was requested.

Adding to the confusion, many men did not understand the duties involved in specific job titles, and people who could not dictate requested stenographers, and people needing file clerks asked for clerk typists. In the end, large numbers of women Marines felt let down and were bored by monotonous assignments that

took only a fraction of their time and made scant demands on their skills. Colonel Streeter understood their frustration and made it a habit to visit women Marines in the field often to give regular pep talks on the vital importance of every job to the overall war effort.

Contradicting the adage that there is never too much of a good thing, the exceptionally high caliber of the women recruited in the early phases of the war resulted in too many underemployed WRs. In Colonel Streeter's opinion:

In test scores, educational level, civilian experience, and special skills, these women, as a group, were well above "average." Only a few of the jobs open to them in the Marine Corps were "above average" in responsibility and demands for skill, a great majority of the jobs were quite ordinary, and many more were actually extremely simple. Yet, somebody had to do these simple jobs. There were not enough women sufficiently lacking in intelligence, clerical ability, education and skill to be happy in these simple jobs. So, Women Reservists capable of more skilled work had to be misassigned—especially at first and especially at Headquarters Marine Corps.

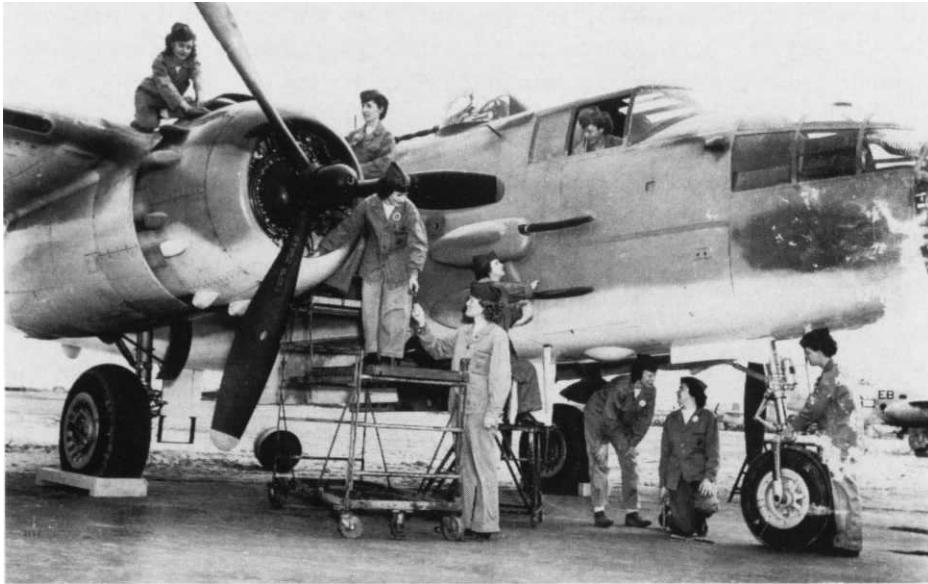
One woman who was not bored with her job in Washington was Audrey Bennington, who summarized her tour from 23 March 1943 to 25 October 1945 and declared it one of the most important times of her life:

May 1st 1943 assigned to Headquarters Colonel Streeter's section, working with Colonel Cecil Rhoads, and Major Charlotte Gower. February 1944, first Woman Marine—oldest Marine Barracks, 8th & Eye Streets, Washington, secre-

Cpl Ellen V. Russell freed a Marine to fight when she served as a butcher in the post commissary at the Marine Barracks, Quantico, Virginia, during the war.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 25224





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 8927

Crew Chief TSgt Selma "Rusty" Olson, standing below the propeller, directs a WR repair crew servicing a North American Mitchell B-25 bomber at Cherry Point in March 1945. In the war, 40 percent of the women Marines held jobs in aviation.

tary to the CO and his officers. Every 10 days taken to then Shangri La (Camp David now) to do ration records. That post was where the action was, believe me. I wish I were capable of writing a book — what material I have.

With time, the dilemma of too many, overqualified women resolved itself because as the war progressed there was ample work for everyone, male supervisors eventually gained confidence in the women and were more willing to release the men they had held back to train them, and the later recruit classes had fewer exceptionally skilled enlistees.

More than half of all Women Reservists were engaged in clerical work — about the same percentage as in civilian life. But new ground was broken as women went to work as radio operators, photographers, parachute riggers, motor transport drivers, aerial gunnery instructors, cooks, bakers, Link trainer instructors, control tower operators, motion picture technicians, automotive mechanics, teletype operators, cryptographers, laundry managers, post exchange salespersons and managers, auditors, audio-visual librarians, as-

sembly and repair mechanics, metalsmiths, weather observers, artists, aerial photographers, photograph analysts, chemists, postal clerks, musicians, statisticians, stewardesses, and writers.

In a 1979 interview, Colonel Streeter confided she was greatly amused that WRs were in "secret and confidential files" because ". . . they always claim that women can't keep a confidence, you know." One WR second lieutenant assigned to secret and confidential files presumably had little trouble with the security clearance — Eugenia D. Lejeune, the youngest daughter of Major General Commandant John A. Lejeune.

Aviation

The most open-minded military units throughout the war and after were the aviation components of all the services. Presumably because they were relative pioneers themselves, aviation leaders were less tradition-bound, and they enthusiastically asked for large numbers of women and were willing to assign them to technical fields. Marines were no exception and right away asked for 9,100. Eventually, nearly one-third of the Women Reservists served in aviation at Marine Corps

Air Stations (MCAS) at Cherry Point, Edenton, Santa Barbara, El Toro, Parris Island, Mojave, El Centro, Quantico, Ewa, and at the Marine Corps Aviation Depot (MCAD) in Miramar.

Because of the large number of women posted to air commands, Aviation Women's Reserve Squadrons were formed: Number 1 at Mojave; Number 2 at Santa Barbara; Number 3 at El Centro; Numbers 4 and 5 at Miramar; Numbers 6-10 at El Toro; Number 11 at Parris Island; Number 12 at Ewa; Numbers 15-20 at Cherry Point; and Number 21 at Quantico.

Matching Skills to Needs

World War II changed for all time the notion of proper women's work. In the Armed Forces as in civilian life, necessity caused the rules to be rewritten and while an effort was made to fit the women into jobs related to their former occupations, there was, by necessity, an openness to new ideas. Fewer Marine women than civilians were used as stenographers and general clerks, but more were assigned as typists; fewer were used as office machine operators, but far more were assigned to supply and supervisory work. Fewer women Marines were considered professionals in the Corps, but this was due to the large number of school teachers who enlisted but could not be used as instructors.

Fewer women were used in skilled trades than came from these jobs in civilian life, but more women proportionately were used in mechanical jobs than came from these jobs as civilians — especially in aviation.

In 1945, looking towards the future, Colonel Streeter suggested that if women were ever again to be enlisted into the Marine Corps, the whole process of classification and assignment could be greatly improved if all jobs were categorized into four classes:

Women's Reserve Employment

At the end of the war a statistical breakdown of the 17,672 women on duty on 1 June 1945 showed them working in the following occupations:

Professional; Semi-professional

Scientific	76
Personnel	338
Artistic, Musical	306
Misc (teachers)	622
TOTAL	1,342

Clerical

Clerk General	1,764
Clerk Typist	2,982
Stenographer	1,129
Special Clerical	1,182
Clerical: Supervisory or Administrative	498
Clerical: Communications	661
Clerical: Supply	1,936
Clerical: Office Machine Operators	127
TOTAL	10,279

Sales

TOTAL	741
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Service

Personal Service	438
Protective Service	149
TOTAL	587

Mechanical

Mechanical: Aviation	1,086
Mechanical: Non-Aviation	285
TOTAL	1,371

Skilled Trades

Skilled Trades Aviation	83
Skilled Trades Non-Aviation	261
TOTAL	344

Semi-Skilled Jobs

Semi-skilled: Aviation	143
Semi-skilled: Non-Aviation	1,162
TOTAL	1,305

Unskilled Jobs

TOTAL	14
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Students

TOTAL	35
General Duty: not elsewhere classified, Basic no SSN	

TOTAL	1,648
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GRAND TOTAL	17,666*
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* 6 women unaccounted for

Class I jobs in which women are better, more efficient than men.

Class II jobs in which women are as good as men, i.e., they can or did replace men on a one-to-one basis.

Class III jobs in which women are not as good as men, but it is possible to use them if the need is great.

Class IV jobs in which women cannot or should not be used at all.

Administration of Women

Until February 1944, the Women's Reserve Section, Officer Procurement Division, a entity within the Division of Reserve, handled most administrative matters concerning

Women Reservists. Then, as a result of a reorganization at Headquarters, all matters involving recruiting, uniforming, recreation and welfare, plans and training were transferred to the appropriate departments and divisions, stripping the Women's Reserve Section of much of its work. After that, its principal duties were: to form and move basic training classes to the recruit depot, to make appropriate selections for officer candidate school, to process resignations and separations of MCWR officers, and to maintain the records and handle correspondence concerning the above matters.

In essence, the MCWR as an organization was always more a perception than reality. Generally, the women were regarded as "extra" Ma-

rines to be managed by the long-established divisions that oversaw the administration of the men. Furthermore, when Women Reservists were assigned to posts and stations, they reported to the commanding officer of their unit, who was subordinate to the commanding officer of the post, and who, in turn, was responsible to the Commandant of the Marine Corps. The MCWR Director was a staff officer not in the chain of command, and, in truth, she had nothing to "direct."

Director, MCWR

There was never any question that there had to be an MCWR Director, especially to gain the public's favor, but her authority was an illusion. She had a great deal of influence but



Photo courtesy of Mary R. Rich

The WRs parade at Camp Lejeune in 1944.

could not take independent action. The Director was clearly responsible for the tone of the Women's Reserve and as Marines gradually gained confidence in her judgement, they paid more attention to her suggestions.

At the outset, in an unusual move, Major Streeter was assigned a run-

ning mate—the very patient Major Rhoads who sat beside her for six months and taught her the Marine Corps way. As it turned out, this was a great advantage both for the Director and for the MCWR. Captain McAfee, first WAVE Director, once remarked that she had not had a run-

ning mate, and since she came into the Navy totally inexperienced in military custom, she made some unfortunate mistakes which stirred up a certain resentment against her. Grateful for Major Rhoads' guidance, but somewhat embarrassed that after six months on the job, she was the

Henderson Hall women Marines presented a stage production, "Manhattan Scene," in which they could once again don formal civilian attire in 1945. From left are: Sgt Shirley Heyser;

Sgt Margaret Michalik; Sgt Myrtle Douglas; Cpl Emma Guidry; PFC Angeline Porfilio; Sgt Vivian Coss; Cpl Bernice Peart; Sgt Mary Thompson; and Cpl Mary Kerkhoff.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 13064





Marine Corps Art Collection

Artist Marion A. Allen drew this sketch of Barracks 57 in the WR area at Camp Lejeune in 1944. The women made their

living quarters "homier" with an abundance of photographs, stuffed animals, and other mementos of their civilian lives.

Members of the 2d Headquarters Battalion at Henderson Hall pass in review for BG Gen Littleton W. T. Waller, Jr., the Direc-

tor of Personnel at Headquarters, Marine Corps. With Gen Waller is Maj Martrese R. Ferguson, battalion commander.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 13470

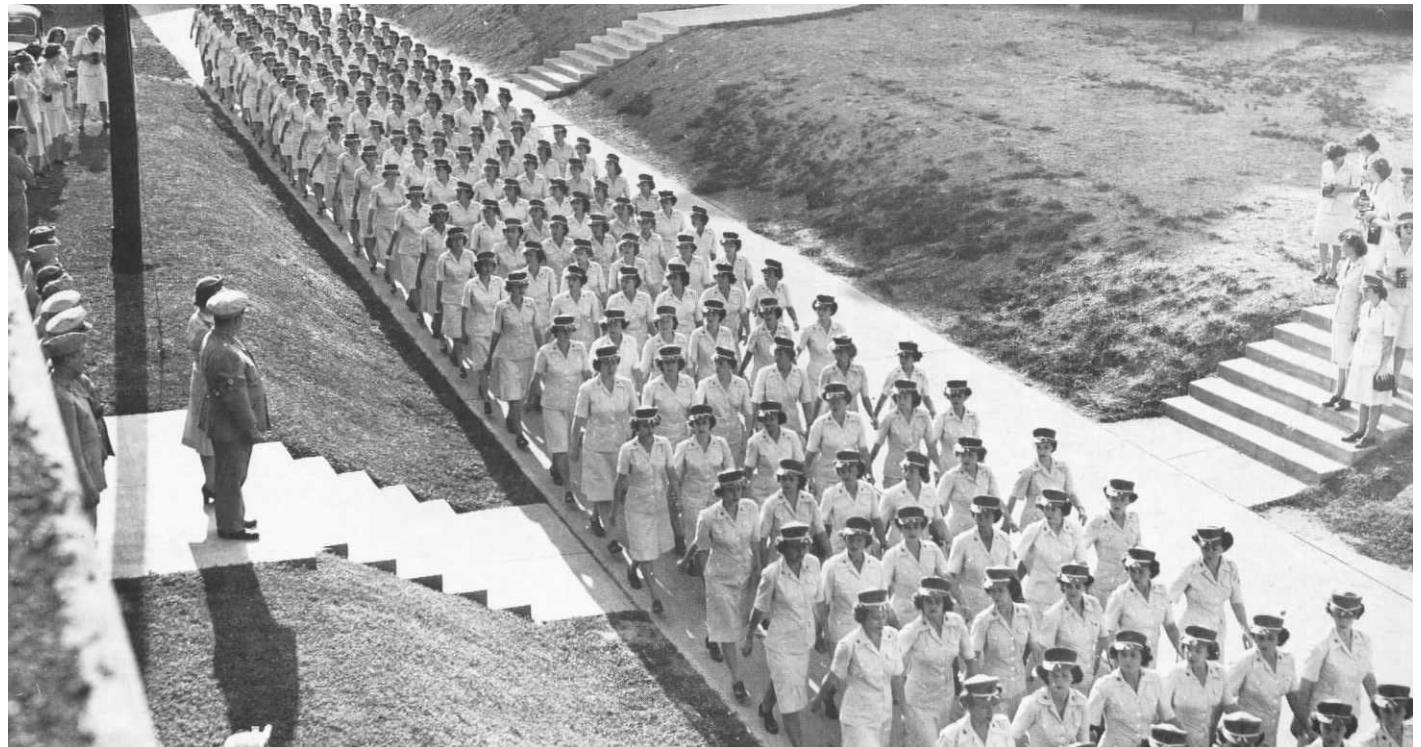




Photo courtesy of Sarah Thornton

Cpl June Richardson models a "new" uniform at a Parris Island fashion show.

only woman director with a mentor at her elbow, Major Streeter sent a memo to Colonel Waller asking for more autonomy. Officers at every level in the chain of command recommended disapproval, but Major Streeter eventually prevailed by acknowledging the wisdom of their decision to give her a running mate—which she admitted kept her from falling flat on her face—and by making the points that one can't stay in leading reins forever, it would be more dignified if she would be allowed to take over alone, and the Marine Corps wasn't getting its money out of her.

So, on 29 October 1943, she became a Special Assistant to the Director of Personnel to advise him on matters of policy. A month later on 22 November, the law amended, she was promoted to lieutenant colonel and then, on 1 February 1944, to colonel. Still, she had no authority of her own, never signed official letters except acknowledgements of monthly reports, and was expected not to interfere unless the situation involved blatant disregard of approved policies. Even then, she merely apprised the Director of Personnel of problems and perhaps offered suggestions, but he took such action as he saw fit.

It was quite a disappointment to

Colonel Streeter when she recognized, quite by chance, the limits of her position. Once, looking for sympathy, she went to Colonel Waller and said, "You know, Colonel, it's a little hard on me. I've got so much responsibility and no authority." She was taken back by his quick response, "Colonel Streeter, you have no responsibility either." It served her very well that no one else—male or female—was ever quite sure just how much authority she did have.

Assistants for the Women's Reserve

The concept that WRs were Marines just like all others, to be administered and managed in the same manner as the men, was not easily put into practice. Routine information was transmitted through the established chain of command, but the Director needed to know much more if she held any hope of guiding the fledgling organization, nourishing and encouraging the good and putting a stop to the bad. Therefore, at each station where WRs served, the senior woman was designated Assistant for the Womens' Reserve and she was charged with keeping the post commander informed of all matters pertaining to the women under his command.

Perhaps more importantly, she was expected to keep in close touch with the MCWR Director, advising

At whatever base they were stationed in the States, women Marines had an active athletic program, as shown by this 1945 MCWR softball team at Parris Island.

Photo courtesy of Sarah Thornton



her on the state of health, welfare, jobs, training, housing, recreation, morale, and discipline of the women while not violating the chain of command. Each month, she sent a written report to Headquarters with a copy to the post commanding officer. It contained information on all aspects of the well-being of the women, along with comments of particular interest at the station. Normally, the information was shared with Colonel Streeter who used it to supplement her own frequent inspection trips to assess the success or failure of official policies.

Authority

In most cases, men supervised women Marines on the job, but routine matters of discipline were left to the women officers. When male officers had serious problems with the women at work, they generally turned to the senior woman on board. This unusual idea of shared responsibility was certainly alien to Marines and caused more than a few problems, but in most instances it worked.

Ordinarily, women Marines were organized into battalions or squadrons with women line officers in command. If a WR did not perform her work satisfactorily, or arrived late, her male work supervisor did not discipline her but reported the problem to her commanding officer

for action. On the other hand, if a WR requested leave, her commanding officer did not grant it without first clearing it with the work supervisor. It often happened that unit obligations in the barracks area, such as mess duty, training, parades, "field days," and inspections conflicted with work schedules, and this created some animosity between female commanders and male work supervisors.

There was genuine ambiguity, as well, about the authority invested in women officers and NCOs. The stated policy said that it was limited to the administration of the Women's Reserve and to be exercised solely over WRs. Someone had determined that the relationship of women officers and noncommissioned officers to enlisted men was akin to that of a civilian teacher in a military school — senior women could give instructions, but matters of discipline and job performance were to be referred to the man's commanding officer.

In time, the Commandant found it necessary to provide some clarification. "It appears that the services of officers and non-commissioned officers of the Marine Corps Women's Reserve are not being realized to the fullest extent due to some doubt as to the scope of their authority . . ." he wrote in March 1944. Explaining that the matter had been considered by the Navy Department he continued, ". . . it is concluded that it is entirely proper for a woman officer to be assigned to duty subordinate to a commanding officer and her directions and orders in the proper performance of such duty are the acts of the officer in command, even though such orders are directed to male personnel." This simple statement allowed women to become adjutants, personnel, and mess officers.

Assignment and Housing

Out of consideration for the women — their welfare, morale, and

reputation — geographical assignments were based on several factors besides Marine Corps personnel needs. Originally, women were to be sent only to posts where their services had been requested and then only if appropriate housing was available. The November 1942 survey which queried Marine Corps posts on the number of women they could use also asked about suitable quarters.

In the 1940s, "nice girls" seldom lived away from home or by themselves, and when they did, there was always a chaperone figure somewhere in the picture. Even in wartime, and even in the midst of such unusual circumstances as women serving in the Armed Forces, homage was paid to the accepted protocol. To prevent loneliness and avoid unfavorable comments, no fewer than two Marine women were assigned to a station or sub-station, enlisted women could not be assigned to a post unless there was a woman officer in the near vicinity, and it was customary to assign women officers to units of 25 or more WRs. The ratio was considerably less in the procurement offices in large cities.

On most posts women Marines had a commanding officer who reported to the post commander. However, there was a new wrinkle in that the women were an autonomous entity — proud to run their own outfit, handling general administration, barracks area maintenance, and mess halls. The relatively few women Marines stationed in large cities were given subsistence, a monetary allowance to pay for housing and meals.

An exception was made in Washington, D.C., where a new and independent post, Henderson Hall, was built to house the 2,400 WRs stationed there. Officially, it was named for the first Commandant, General Archibald Henderson, but understandably it became "Hen Hall."

When women joined the Marine

Corps they elevated the quality of barracks living up a notch or two. Stark squadbays were sometimes softened with pastel paint and stuffed animals could be found resting on tightly made bunks. Dressers were lined up to provide a little privacy, shower curtains were hung, and doors closed off toilet stalls. Day rooms set aside to entertain dates were furnished with board games, pianos, and record players and space was found for cooking appliances, hair dryers, and sewing machines in lounges reserved for women only.

Marines didn't rush to embrace the feminine touches, but after a reasonable period of adjustment, commanding officers were proud to traipse visitors and dignitaries through the immaculate WR barracks and mess halls — clothing hung facing in one direction, sparkling mirrors, no dust kittens under the bunks, and glossy floors buffed to perfection with Kotex.

Punishment

As early as November 1942, Headquarters wisely considered a disciplinary plan for the Women's Reserve. The other services were no help since the WAACs still served with the Army but were not part of it and the Navy had no predetermined policy except to say they would treat problems according to principles generally used for men with whatever modifications might be necessary for special instances such as sex offenses.

Not knowing what to expect and unwilling to leave it to chance, Marines wisely established discipline policies for Women Reservists:

1. Distinctions between officers and enlisted personnel would, in general, be the same as made between officers and enlisted men of the regular Marine Corps.

2. Officers would exercise normal disciplinary functions and MCWR officers would have similar respon-

sibility when they attained appropriate rank and command.

3. Establishment of brigs or post prisons for the confinement of women was not contemplated, but confinement to quarters was deemed appropriate.

4. Exclusive of sentences involving confinement, punishment would be awarded as it was for officers and men of the regular Marine Corps.

5. Trial by court-martial would be recommended only in serious cases, particularly when confinement seemed a possibility.

6. For offenses not warranting trial, separation from service would be by the most expeditious means in accordance with policies applicable to men.

Little time was wasted on female offenders, and fortunately, there were relatively few problems. Because of their communal, intense desire to be accepted by Marines and approved by the general public, women Marines were their own severest critics and peer pressure to walk a tight line proved very effective. The records show only 36 enlisted women separated out of the total of 18,000 as a result of general and summary courts-martial. When officers resigned to escape a general court-martial, their discharge was "under other than honorable conditions."

Unauthorized absences—usually less than 10 days—accounted for the most common infractions; violations of regulations (uniform, fraternization, etc.) followed. Unlike earlier policies governing female military nurses, marriage was a cause for neither discharge nor punishment, and pregnancy was considered a medical rather than disciplinary case.

Much as with the men, punishment included confinement to quarters, loss of pay, reduction in rank, extra police duties, and in extreme cases, disciplinary discharges. However, the severity of punishment meted out to men and women accused of sex offenses differed

markedly and the female officers balked at the harsh treatment of WRs in these instances.

Marines are the acknowledged masters in matters of discipline and morale, but there was no history to help them bridge the gender gap when the women landed. These women were not pliant teenagers, but rather adults, all 20 years old or older. Some were married, some had children, and a few had grandchildren. Since it was a time when females were expected to adhere to near-Victorian standards, military leaders assumed a paternalistic attitude and the inevitable occurred—grown, mature women were often treated like school girls. The senior women officers, many with roots in academia, were often more guilty than the men.

A galling but unchallenged rule was that women on board a base, unlike men of equal rank, could not

Twin sisters Irene and Madelene Spencer toured New England with the War Bond drive show, "Direct Hit," which starred boxing champion Jack Dempsey, who was a Coast Guard officer, cowboy star Gene Autry, and comedian Frank Fontaine.

have an automobile. It added to the allure of assignment to the motor pool that the drivers of trucks, jeeps, and buses were more mobile than their sisters.

Luckily, Colonel Streeter was able to balance high standards of behavior with an earthy understanding of human nature and she seemed to know just when to tighten the reins and when to turn her head. She was pragmatic about discreet instances of fraternization and she recognized that when dealing with men and women, some things could not be strictly regulated. She was a gifted leader who subscribed to the theory that ". . . the most able commanders, be they men or women, are those who take care of their people and who keep them out of trouble by anticipating the problems that may confront them."

She expected women officers, regardless of their assignment, to

Photo courtesy of Irene and Madelene Spencer





Photo courtesy of Evelyn Wallman Gins

Following the devastation visited upon the carrier Franklin in operations off Japan, as seen in the picture held by these Wom-

share responsibility for the morale and welfare of enlisted women and this policy was sacred until separate women's units were abolished in the 1970s. Colonel Streeter was rightfully proud that the Women's Reserve organized a recreation and education service long before the Special Services Division was formed, and she credited it with the high morale of the women Marines. Yet, in the end, it was her own good sense, concern for her women, pride in the Marine Corps, and determination that sustained the wartime WRs.

Overseas

Since the Women's Army Corps began as an auxiliary, it was less strictly regulated than the other women's services. Consequently, WACs served in all theaters of war including the Southwest Pacific Area, the Southeast Asia Command, the China-Burma-India Theater, the China Theater, and the Middle East Theater, as well as in Europe, Africa, Hawaii, Alaska, New Caledonia, Puerto Rico, and several smaller sites.

en Marines, they were sent on a bond tour in 1945, which took them to Dallas, Texas, where this picture was taken.

While some members of Congress, uncomfortable about American women so close to combat, argued for restrictions, there were military men like Marine Lieutenant General Holland M. Smith who insisted that women Marines could be used at Pearl Harbor to release men for combat. His view was shared by Navy Secretary James V. Forrestal, who told Congress that an estimated 5,000 naval servicewomen were needed in Hawaii. The outcome was new legislation, Public Law 441, 78th Congress, signed on 27 September 1944 which amended Section 504, Public Law 689, 77th Congress, 30 July 1942 by providing that:

Members of the Women's Reserve shall not be assigned to duty on board vessels of the Navy or in aircraft while such aircraft are engaged in combat missions, and shall not be assigned to duty outside the American Area and the Territories of Hawaii and Alaska, and may be assigned to duty outside

the continental United States only upon their prior request.

Colonel Streeter, anticipating the new policy, was concerned about choosing mature, stable women for duty outside the continental United States. So, she went to see WAC Director Colonel Hobby, and said, "Look, Oveta, what did you find was the best way of selecting your people to go overseas?" By her own admission, going straight to Colonel Hobby was "... not exactly according to Hoyle," but "... it was certainly sensible and nobody fussed about it."

Colonel Hobby offered simple advice: "A person who's had a good record in this country is likely to have a good record abroad, and a person who's had disciplinary problems in this country, or whose health wasn't good, we wouldn't send abroad. Sometimes you sent more mature ones than the newest enlistees."

With this in mind, the Marine Corps laid out the criteria for selecting volunteers for duty in Hawaii: satisfactory record for a period of six



Photo courtesy of Marine Corps Gazette

Col Ruth Cheney Streeter, Director of Women Reserves, and Maj Martrese Ferguson, commanding officer of the WRs at Henderson Hall, review a parade in October 1944 during a conference of senior WR officers at Headquarters, Marine Corps.

months military service subsequent to completion of recruit or specialist training; motivation, the desire to do a good job, rather than excitement or hope of being near someone they cared about; good health; stable personality; sufficient skill to fill one of the billets for which Women Reservists had been requested; and age. Not having been a significant factor for success in the WACs, age was not specified, but since the minimum tour was to be two years with little hope for leave, the health and status of dependents and close family members was considered.

This settled, in October 1944, Colonel Streeter and Major Marion B. Dryden flew to Hawaii to prepare for the arrival of the women and most of all to inspect the proposed living arrangements. Major Dryden, the senior woman officer serving in aviation, accompanied the Director because half the women were to be stationed at the Marine Corps Air Station, Ewa.

There was no shortage of volunteers and on 2 December an advance party of four officers—Major Marion Wing, commanding officer; First

Lieutenant Dorothy C. McGinnis adjutant; First Lieutenant Ruby V. Bishop, battalion quartermaster; and Second Lieutenant Pearl M. Martin, recreation officer—flew to Hawaii to make preliminary arrangements at Pearl Harbor. Not long after, they were followed by the advance party for Ewa, Captain Helen N. Crean, commanding officer; First Lieutenant Caroline J. Ransom, post exchange officer; Second Lieutenant Bertha K. Ballard, mess officer, along with Second Lieutenant Constance M. Bernkolz, mess officer for Pearl Harbor.

Meanwhile, a staging area was established at the Marine Corps Base, San Diego, where the women underwent a short but intense physical conditioning course that included strapping on a 10-pound pack to practice ascending and descending cargo nets and jumping into the water

In early 1945, first Women Reserves to be deployed overseas embarked for Hawaii, carrying haversacks with blanket rolls. Upon arrival they were greeted with acclaim.

Photo courtesy of Mary R. Rich



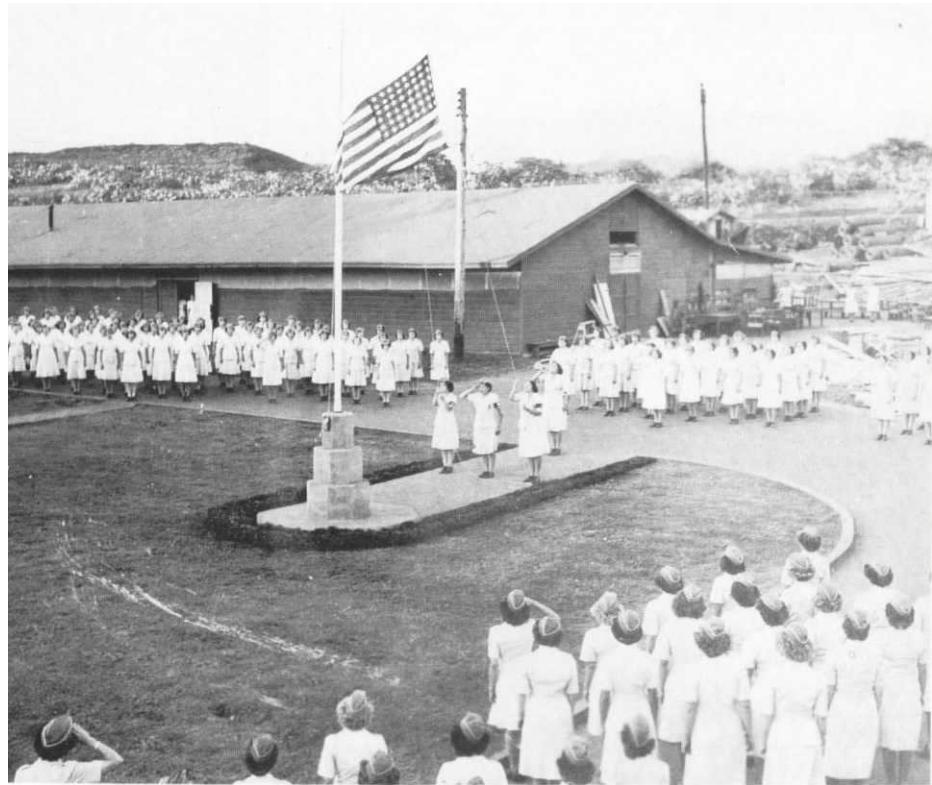


Photo courtesy of Mildred Cornwell Kelliher

Soon after arriving in Hawaii, WRs stand to for evening colors in the women's area.

from shipboard. In the classroom, they learned about the people of Hawaii, how to recognize Allied insignia, shipboard procedures, and the importance of safeguarding military information.

On 25 January 1945, with Captain Marna V. Brady, officer-in-charge, the first contingent of five WR officers and 160 enlisted women, with blanket rolls on their backs, marched up the gangplank of the S.S. *Matsonia* to sail from San Francisco to Hawaii. Their shipmates were a mixed lot of male Marines, sailors, WAVES, military wives, and ex-POWs, and because of the lopsided ratio of men to women, the WRs were restricted to a few crowded spaces on board ship.

Two days out to sea, they changed to summer service uniform, and on 28 January, they disembarked in Honolulu as the Pearl Harbor Marine Barracks Band played "The Marine's Hymn," the "March of the Women Marines," and "Aloha Oe." The WAVES went ashore first—dressed in their best uniform. Then came the WRs—astonished that their

no-nonsense appearance in dungarees, boondockers, and overseas caps seemed to please the crowd of curious Marines who had gathered to look them over and welcome them to Hawaii.

The majority was quartered in barracks recently vacated by the Seabees at the Moanalua Ridge Area adjacent to the Marine Corps Sixth Base Depot and Camp Catlin. The large, wooden, airy barracks were already very comfortable, but needed modifications for female occupants, so a small number of Seabees remained behind to do some reconditioning. Major Wing, the commanding officer, ". . . had a fine way of treating men" according to Colonel Streeter.

No Seabee could pay for a coke. As many cokes a day as he wanted and he couldn't pay for them. We got more work out of those Seabees than you could ever imagine.

In Hawaii, the women worked much the same as in the States, with most assigned to clerical jobs. More than a third of the women at Ewa

came from the Marine Corps Air Station, Cherry Point, and lost no time before picking up their tools and working on the planes.

At Pearl Harbor, the WRs ran the motor transport section, serving nearly 16,000 persons a month. Scheduled around the clock and with a perfect safety record, they maneuvered the mountainous roads of Hawaii in liberty buses, jeeps, and all types of trucks carrying mail, people, ammunition, and garbage. Marines easily became accustomed to the sight of women drivers, but never quite got used to grease-covered female mechanics working under the hood or chassis of two-and-a-half-ton trucks.

The Deputy Commander, Headquarters, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, gave the WRs high marks for their efficiency, attitude, and enthusiasm, and reported: "The work of Women's Reserve personnel trained in Marine Corps Specialist Schools has measured up to the standard of performance required of men in specialists' assignments, such as Quartermaster Supply Men, Radio Operators, Radio Repairmen, Financial Clerks, Drivers, and Mechanics."

He went on, however, to criticize the typical women's command structure and recommended that, in the future, the administration of the Women's Reserve be handled by the unit to which the women are attached for duty. It was a widespread complaint, already voiced by Colonel Streeter and destined to be repeated by Marines—men and women—for nearly 30 years until the all-female units were finally disbanded in the mid-1970s.

Just before she left the Corps, Colonel Streeter expressed some reservation about the wisdom of sending WRs to Hawaii—despite their substantial contribution. After the initial enthusiasm, interest waned, boyfriends were opposed to having their girls go so far away, especially where they were vastly outnum-



Women Marines participated smartly in the VJ-Day parade in Honolulu on 11 August 1945. They also took part in other

ceremonial events on the island of Oahu while stationed in the islands, a tour they all found extremely enjoyable.

bered, and parents were put off by the length of the tour. There was uneasiness among the women caused by the shifting pronouncements from Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, about how many WRs they really needed, and at the same time, it was becoming clear that victory over Germany was imminent. Fewer women volunteered for overseas and the Director was disappointed.

By the summer of 1945, there were 21 officers and 366 enlisted Women Reservists at Ewa, and 34 officers and 580 enlisted women in the Women's Reserve Battalion, Marine Garrison Forces, 14th Naval District. Some stayed to process the men being shipped through Hawaii on their way home for demobilization, but they were all back in the States by January. Because women serving overseas accumulated credits for discharge at the rate of two per month, compared to one per month for those in the United States, most were eligible for discharge soon after V-J Day.

Women's Reserve Band

Probably the most colorful of all the Women's Reserve units was the Marine Corps Women's Reserve Band formed in November 1943 by Captain William F. Santelmann and

The WR Band at Parris Island, trained by musicians from the Marine Band in Washington, D.C., played for women's reviews and men's formal guard mounts, and entertained both on and off of the bases throughout the country during the war.

Photo courtesy of Sarah Thornton

trained by members of the Marine Band. Prominent music schools and colleges were canvassed for candidates and talented enlisted women were auditioned to find the requisite 43 musicians. Its director was Master

Sergeant Charlotte Plummer, formerly director of the Portland, Oregon, public school system band and member of the city's municipal band.

The Camp Lejeune-based band gave concerts at Parris Island, Cherry Point, Henderson Hall, and on national radio programs. It played at guard mounts, inspections, graduations, dances, and occasionally at the officers club. It may be best remembered for stirring performances at the weekly Saturday morning MCWR recruit depot reviews, marching to the rhythm of its own "March of the Women Marines," written especially for it by Musician First Class Louis Saverino of the Marine Band.

The band members were deeply affected by the hospital concerts where they entertained young Marines on gurneys, in wheelchairs, propped up in bed, and trying to applaud without hands. They couldn't help but think of their own husbands, boyfriends, brothers, brothers-in-law, cousins, classmates, neighbors, and loved ones. Not a week passed that a band member didn't receive bad news from the front.

Playing for the wounded and maimed Marines added an aching poignancy to the graduation parades where the band stepped off in front

of thousands of men headed for the Pacific. And, it was equally hard for members to be indifferent to the trainloads of arriving recruits, as they greeted the youths with stirring martial music, already thinking of the day when they, too, would graduate and go off to war.

The WR Band played for President Roosevelt and Admiral Chester W. Nimitz and, at the request of the Treasury Department, it made War Bond and Victory Loan tours, traveling to Chicago, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and Cleveland—always to great acclaim.

The work must have seemed frivolous and glamorous and it certainly had those moments. But the band members rehearsed long hours; toured in crowded, poorly maintained buses; and carried heavy instruments in pouring rain, under the broiling sun, and while marching through sucking mud. Most had played in orchestras and bands as civilians, but had never worked at their music for eight intensive hours a day.

The practice room was unheated and Loudene Grady (saxophone and clarinet) and Louise Hensinger (Sousaphone and dance band vocalist) had to get up before the others and go over to the room and

build a fire in the coal stove before rehearsals.

Ellen Stone and Bonnie Smallwood (snare drum, traps, percussion) recalled the base concerts:

The weather was changeable One day a cold wind would blow the marching women musicians off balance, hitting the instruments against their teeth and bruising their arms. The drums would loosen up and have no tone. Valves on the brass instruments would stick. The clarinets would crack and lips would stick to the brass mouthpieces.

No complaints were heard in August 1945 when the band director called the women together to announce that Japan was expected to surrender at any moment:

. . . we're to hit the streets in uniform, and we're to parade, parade, and parade! When word of the surrender comes, we must be ready to fall out and parade immediately We have to be ready to put on our uniforms, get our instruments, and our music pouches, and be out of here.

They freshened their make-up, rolled up their hair, brought their in-

The MCWR Band, directed by TSgt Charlotte L. Plummer, performed in concert at the Camp Theater, Camp Lejeune.
Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 7305





Photo courtesy of Audre Fall Wells

Audre Fall was the first drum major of the Marine Corps Women's Reserve Band.

WRS Jo Meers, Mickey Merrill, Mary Szoroletta, and Neva Vredevoogd celebrate the end of the Pacific War with "lemonade" at the Blue Mirror, a favorite "watering hole" on 14th Street in Washington, D.C., where Marines often met.

Photo courtesy of Neva Vredevoogd Austin



struments into the squadroom for the first time in two years, and quietly waited. When at about 1900 on 14 August the announcement finally came, the women cheered and fell out for the victory celebration. For three hours they zigzagged throughout the base, playing until their lips were sore, and blisters formed on their fingers and heels.

Thousands of Marines, men and women, spilled out of the barracks and the theater and danced in and out of their ranks. The women played every march they knew by heart because they couldn't read their music in the pandemonium that followed them. And, when entire sections couldn't play because of their tears, the drums just beat out the cadence.

Epilogue: War's End

Strength

A mere two-and-a-half years after the formation of the Marine Corps Women's Reserve, there were 18,460 women on active duty: 17,640 enlisted persons and 820 officers. Women commanded 28 units and comprised



Photo courtesy of Sarah Thornton

As other WRs look on, SSgt Elaine Martin cuts the birthday cake on 13 February 1946 for Parris Island Marines celebrating the 3d anniversary of the founding women's program. Demobilization of women Marines had already begun by this date.

another 17. A few were assigned independently to specialties such as recruiting.

When the war finally ended with the abrupt surrender of the Japanese, women Marines were working in 225 specialties in 16 out of 21 functional fields, filling 85 percent of the enlisted jobs at Headquarters Marine Corps and comprising one-half to two-thirds of the permanent personnel at all large Marine Corps posts and stations.

Despite the tentative beginning, women's units flourished. Line organizations included Women's Reserve battalions at Henderson Hall, Quantico, Camp Lejeune, Parris Island, San Diego, Camp Pendleton, and Pearl Harbor; the School Detachment at Camp Lejeune; and Women Reservist companies at San Diego, San Francisco, and the Navy Yard at Mare Island, California, and in Washington, D.C., along with aviation units at Cherry Point, Quantico, Parris Island, El Toro, Miramar, El Centro, Santa Barbara, Mojave,

Ewa, and Eagle Mountain Lake (Texas).

Since it was natural to use women in the quartermaster field, WRs were working at the Depot of Supplies in Philadelphia; South Annex, Norfolk; Camp Elliott, California; and Depot of Supplies, San Francisco. They also worked at the four procurement districts: Eastern, in Philadelphia; Southern, in Atlanta; Central, in Chicago; and Western, at San Francisco.

Demobilization

The task of demobilizing the war machine was essentially an administrative process requiring more clerks than warriors. There's an old saw that says an army fights on beans and bullets. In 1945, the War Department learned that an army disbands on a mountain of paperwork. Although nearly everyone expected the women to return home quickly, they were needed more, not less. Policies regarding the discharge of women—not only from the Marine Corps, but also from the other

services—changed daily. Even while acknowledging their own opposition to women in uniform, a lot of men were anxious to keep female clerks on the job to process separation orders, cut paychecks, distribute medals and decorations, arrange transportation, assist surviving dependents, and otherwise settle the accounts of thousands of Marines.

The demobilization procedures called for mandatory resignation or discharge of all WRs, officers and enlisted women, by 1 September 1946. In fact, in November 1945 the Commandant was quoted in the newspapers as saying that the Marine Corps Women's Reserve would be reduced to 2,638 enlisted women and 200 officers by 30 June 1946 and the organization ". . . will completely vanish from the picture by September"

With the MCWR already at two-thirds its peak strength, Colonel Streeter, believing women should remain no longer than needed, asked to be released. She resigned on 6 December 1945 and, the following day, her assistant, Lieutenant Colonel Katherine A. Towle, was appointed the second Director of the wartime Marine Corps Women's Reserve and promoted to colonel. To Colonel Towle fell the dual responsibility of overseeing the demobilization of the women and planning for a postwar women's organization.

In the spring of 1946 there was a steady stream of correspondence among the Services exploring various proposals to give women permanent status in the military. The Commandant endorsed a plan for a small women's reserve to be led in peacetime by a director with three officers at Headquarters and six in recruiting.

Conceding that some sort of women's military organization was inevitable, and legislation authorizing it was pending, the Marine Corps relaxed the requirement that WR



Photo courtesy of Raelyn Harman Subramanian

The WRs of Squadroom 1, Barracks 6, Company L, Henderson Hall, enjoy a farewell dinner on Admiral Nimitz Day in 1945.

officers resign. Those still on active duty could ask for assignment to inactive status, and those already separated were sent a letter asking them to reenlist in the Reserve and reminding them of the privileges and responsibilities of belonging to the Marine Corps Reserve. Upon request, they were reappointed to the permanent rank held upon resignation.

A point system, similar but not identical to the one used for men, was worked out to control the flow of separations. Women with 25 points on 1 September 1945 were eligible for immediate discharge and the required number of points was progressively reduced until it reached zero the following July. Exceptions were made and immediate separation was possible for women at least 38 years old (later changed to 35) and for married women whose servicemen husbands had been discharged. Married women with a minimum of one year's service could be released if their husbands, discharged or not, were in the country.

At first, commanding officers released women directly from their duty stations and when a unit's strength fell below 100, it was disbanded. Later, separation centers were set up at Henderson Hall,

Camp Lejeune, San Diego, and El Toro. In contrast to the others, the WRs in San Diego were attached to the male 1st Separation Company. Maintaining the paternalistic stance taken right from the start, female leaders were charged with assisting the women through the transition from Marine to civilian.

The office of the wartime MCWR was closed on 15 June 1946 when Colonel Towle began terminal leave. Before leaving the Marine Corps to return to the University of California's Berkeley campus as administrative assistant to the vice president and provost, Colonel Towle proposed the name of Major Julia E.

Capt Henry W. Bransom swears in Julia E. Hamblet, the first woman from the nation's capital to join the Marine Corps, who became the director of the postwar Women's Reserve, 1946-1948. She is credited with maintaining the interest of the released WRs during those years and for organizing WR platoons across the country.

Marine Corps Historical Collection





Photo courtesy of Raelyn Harman Subramanian

Sisters Petrina and Rose Nigro, with their fellow Marine, Betty Hall, have dinner in Washington, D.C., in 1945, before Rose and Betty leave for duty in San Diego.

Hamblet to be director of the women's postwar organization. She wrote:

It is believed that Major Hamblet has all the attributes and qualifications desirable in a director of a postwar MCWR. She is a college graduate, about 30 years of age (which is considered a great advantage in appealing to volunteers among younger women, especially those of college age), of fine appearance, with a great deal of natural dignity and poise, and has an outstanding service record and reputation. She has had experience in both line and aviation assignments and has served in the present MCWR since her commissioning in the First Officers' Class in May 1943.

The recommendation was acknowledged by Headquarters but not acted upon. Meanwhile Colonel Towle's assistant, Captain Mary V. Illich, set to work tidying up the details of shutting down the wartime Women's Reserve. With one private first class, Captain Illich expected to finish by 15 July 1946, about a month and a half ahead of the Commandant's schedule.

Ironically, on the day before she left, Colonel Towle, in a report of the state of the MCWR to the Director of Personnel, wrote:

General morale during demobilization has been gratifyingly high. Part of this had been due to the definite stand the Marine Corps itself had taken from the beginning on MCWR demobilization, particularly in setting and maintaining 1 September as the terminal date of the wartime Women's Reserve. It has been a goal to work toward, and Marine Corps women have never had the uncertainty and confusion concerning demobilization

The cover of the music for "March of the Women Marines," music and words by Louis Saverino and Emil Grasser, respectively, of the U.S. Marine Band.

Cover sheet courtesy of Marine Band



which have occurred in some of the other women's services because of the shifting of date and changes in policy.

How could she have foreseen that as the September deadline neared, case after case of exception would be requested? Few were granted, but it kept Captain Illich so busy that on 30 August she received an assistant, First Lieutenant Mary Janice Hale. Lieutenant Hale's appointment came on the heels of a major change in policy when on 7 August 1946 the Commandant authorized keeping 100 WRs on active duty at HQMC, for a period of eight months. The women, clerk typists, payroll clerks, and auditors were assigned to a new division of the Personnel Division to administer the Armed Forces Leave Act of 1946. As an inducement to stay, qualified privates first class who applied were automatically promoted to corporal.

The very next day, on 8 August, the Commandant authorized the retention of even more WRs—200 who would stay until 30 June 1947—10 months beyond the original deadline for complete disbandment. He clearly specified that these women "... must have clerical, stenographic or other specific ability (no cooks, truck drivers, hairdressers, etc., unless they have a secondary clerical specification)."

So, in the midst of a determined drive to demobilize the Women's Reserve, 300 women were asked to stay, and even as the last of the WR barracks was being closed, a new unit, Company E, 1st Headquarters Battalion, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, commanded by First Lieutenant Regina M. Durant, was activated on 19 August 1946 with 12 officers and 286 enlisted women.

An anonymous author summed up the demobilization of the Marine Corps Women's Reserve quite well in an undated, unsigned brief history that begins:

It is rumored that when it was announced that women were going to be enlisted in the Marine Corps the air was colored with profanity in the language of every nation as the members of the old Corps gathered to discuss this earth-shattering calamity. It is entirely probable that the wailing and moaning which went on that day amongst the old Marines was never equaled—never, that is, until it was announced that the women Marines were going home. Then, with a complete reversal of attitude, many of those same Marines declared that the women in their offices were essential military personnel and absolutely could not be spared from the office.

On its first-year anniversary, 13 February 1944, the Women's Reserve received a treasured message from President Franklin D. Roosevelt:

The nation is as proud of you as of your fellow Marines—for Marine women are upholding the brilliant traditions of the Corps with a spirit of loyalty and diligence worthy of the highest admiration of all Americans. You have quickly and efficiently taken over scores of different kinds of duties that not long ago were considered strictly masculine assignments; and in doing so, you have freed a large number of well-trained, battle-ready men of the corps for action

But, standing out among all the beautifully worded accolades bestowed on the women Marines of World War II, is a simple statement made by General Holcomb, the Commandant so opposed to having women in the Marine Corps in the beginning: 'Like most Marines, when the matter first came up I didn't believe women could serve any useful purpose in the Marine Corps Since then I've changed my mind.'



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A119296

The statue of Molly Marine at the corner of Elke Place and Canal Street in New Orleans was dedicated on 10 November 1943 to the women of the Marine Corps and serves as a symbol of continuous service for today's women Marines, who send an anniversary tribute each year from their duty stations around the world.

Doris Bibb and members of the Women Marines Association and other former Marine associates gather at the funeral of Col Ruth Cheney Streeter, on 3 October 1990.

Photo courtesy of Doris S. Bibb



Sources

The primary sources for this pamphlet are *History of the Marine Corps Women's Reserve: A Critical Analysis of its Development and Operation, 1943-1945* (Washington 6Dec45), written by Cols Ruth Cheney Streeter and Katherine A. Towle at the end of the war, and LtCol Pat Meid's *Marine Corps Women's Reserve in World War II* (Washington: Historical Branch, G-3 Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1968).

Oral history transcripts of interviews with Col Streeter, *Ruth Cheney Streeter, A Lively Life* (Morristown, N.J. 1979), and Col Katherine A. Towle, *Katherine A. Towle, Administration and Leadership* (Berkeley: University of California, 1970), give behind the scenes insights into the era.

Women in the Military: An Unfinished Revolution, written by MajGen Jeanne Holm, USAF (Ret), is a key reference because it presents a complete picture, comparing the road taken by each service in integrating women into the Armed Forces and argues that interservice cooperation among the female directors played a vital part in the success of all.

Special thanks are reserved for Peter A. Soderbergh, who allowed the author to use anecdotal material from his entertaining and informative social history, *Women Marines: The World War II Era* (Westport and London: Praeger Publishers, 1992). Stories about the women of the WR Band are from their privately published history, *Musical Women Marines of World War II*.

The author's previously published, *A History of the Women Marines, 1946-1977* (Washington, D.C.: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1986), and *Coping With Sexism in the Military* (New York: The Rosen Publishing Group, 1990), were also used. Marine Corps World War II recruiting brochures and booklets, especially "Be A Marine . . . Free a Marine to Fight: U. S. Marine Corps Women's Reserve", and "So Proudly We Serve: U. S. Marine Corps Women's Reserve," were important sources of information regarding recruiting, training, and job opportunities.

"Lady Leathernecks," written by Col Towle for the *Marine Corps Gazette* and published in February 1946, is a good summary of the era. Finally, the contributions of the WRs who entrusted me with their precious photographs and took the time to pen their personal stories were immeasurable. I hope this overview brings back many fond memories.



About the Author

Colonel Mary V. Stremlow, U.S. Marine Corps Reserve (Ret), Deputy Director, New York State Division of Veterans' Affairs, has a bachelor of science degree from New York State University College at Buffalo. Her Marine Corps service includes experience as a company commander; staff operations officer; executive officer, Woman Recruit Training Battalion, Parris Island; inspector-instructor, Women's Reserve Platoon, 3d Infantry Battalion, Boston; instructor at the Woman Officer School, Quantico; woman officer selection officer for the 1st Marine Corps District; and officer-in-charge, Mobilization Station, Buffalo.

She is the author of an official history, *A History of the Women Marines, 1946-1977*, and of *Coping With Sexism in the Military*. She is a frequent public speaker on the history of women veterans and for three years served on the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee on Women Veterans.

Colonel Stremlow counts three other women Marines in her family – Sergeant Rose M. Nigro and Master Sergeant Petrina C. Nigro, both Women Reservists in World War II, and her sister, retired Major Carol Vertalino Diliberto.



WORLD WAR II



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